

# Epidural Steroid Injection

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*A patient's guide*

**Centra Health**

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## Epidural Steroid Injection

An epidural steroid injection is performed by an anesthesiologist.

Steroids have potent anti-inflammatory properties. When injected into the epidural space (an area surrounding the spinal cord fluid sac through which nerves pass as they leave the spinal cord), steroids act directly on nerves and the surrounding tissue to decrease inflammation and related symptoms.

Pain relief may not begin for 24 to 48 hours after the injection and can take up to seven to 10 days to become fully effective.

Sometimes, more than one injection is needed to gain maximum benefit. The procedure is often performed in a series of two or three injections. The injections are limited to three within six months or six within 12 months because more than three doses of the steroid in a six-month period can lead to a greater incidence of side effects.

Possible side effects or complications include headache, backache, infection, bleeding and nerve damage. Potential problems with steroid administration include allergic reaction, fluid retention, increased blood sugar or blood pressure and adrenal suppression. These complications and problems are rare.

## The Procedure

Preparation, procedure and recovery take two to three hours. The procedure itself takes approximately 20 minutes.

The interventional pain service performs almost all procedures under X-ray guidance called fluoroscopy. You will be taken into the fluoroscopy room, where you will be positioned lying on your stomach. During the procedure your blood pressure and pulse will be monitored, and, if needed, you may receive sedation through an IV catheter.

Your back will be cleaned with a betadine solution, which is an antiseptic. Sterile drapes will be placed on your back. An X-ray will be taken to identify the location to place the needle, and a local anesthetic will be used to numb the skin.

A special epidural needle will be placed through the numb spot and directed into the epidural space with X-ray guidance. The only sensation you should feel after the skin is numb is pressure.

Once the needle is in correct position on X-ray, a small amount of X-ray dye will be injected to help ensure the medicine is placed in the proper location. The medications are injected, and the needle is removed.

You will be returned to the recovery area where you will stay for 15 to 30 minutes before being discharged.

## After The Procedure

You may feel relief initially from the procedure if local anesthetic has been included in the injection. After the local anesthetic has worn off, your pain may return to a greater degree for a day or two.

**The actual steroid medication frequently takes two to three days to begin working and seven to 10 days to become fully effective.**

You may experience aching and stiffness in the area of injection for two to four days.

## Diet And Activities

Following the procedure:

- Return to normal diet as tolerated.
- Resume light activities as tolerated, but avoid strenuous activities for the next day or two.
- Do not use any heat on the injection area on the day of the procedure.
- Ice can be used on the injection site if needed.

## Medications

- Tylenol or other nonprescription pain medications should be used for pain control.
- Resume all other routine medications.

## When To Notify Your Physician

You should notify your doctor if any of the following symptoms occur:

- A headache not relieved by medications recommended above
- A stiff neck
- A fever over 101 degrees orally
- Bleeding or unexpected drainage from the wound
- Increasing numbness or weakness in the lower extremities

## Where To Call

Call the Interventional Pain Service Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

- (434) 845-5493

After hours, please call Virginia Baptist Hospital and ask for the anesthesiologist on call.

- (434) 947-4000



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