



Epidural Steroid Injections

Pain Relief for Disk Herniation and Inflamed Nerves

Spine pain is a common experience, with up to 80% of the population developing back pain at some point in their lives. Although many people will have short-term back pain, others will have more chronic pain from injury or degeneration of their spine. One of the most common causes of back pain is a disk herniation, where the oval-shaped cushion between the spinal vertebra bones becomes partially torn. The disk is designed somewhat like a “jelly donut”, where the outer tougher rings, called the annulus, surround an inner gel fluid called the nucleus. When cracks form in the disk annulus, it allows the gel to leak out, leading to inflammation of the nearby nerves. This may be associated with leg pain, numbness, tingling or weakness. Inflammation is a normal part of the natural biological healing process, but it can be excessive and can cause injury to the structures involved. The pain from the torn disk and the irritated nerve root may persist for a prolonged period of time.

How does an Epidural Steroid Injection work?

An **Epidural Steroid Injection** targets the space where the nerves have become swollen with a small needle using X-Ray guidance. The injection of steroids directly around the nerve roots near the disk herniation is thought to reduce inflammation by decreasing swelling, allowing for improved circulation and acceleration of the healing process. The effect may not be long lasting and differs from person to person. Most patients will receive good improvement for several weeks to months after an injection. The pain reduction allows the patient to participate more fully in rehabilitation efforts, such as exercise and physical therapy. Some patients do not experience any pain relief and may in fact feel an increase in pain and/or other symptoms.

How is an Epidural Steroid Injection administered?

The patient is placed on a procedure table under an advanced X-Ray machine. The skin is sterilized and a local anesthetic is injected to numb the area. A small needle then is advanced through the numb region to reach the epidural space. Contrast dye is used to confirm proper placement. The treatment solution is then injected. Usually, the procedure takes about 10-15 minutes. The patient is monitored for 15-30 minutes and then may go home. We do not recommend that patients drive themselves home after the injection.

Does an Epidural Steroid Injection need to be repeated?

Usually, a second or third injection is recommended, depending on the results of the first injection. When epidural injections are not helpful, a thorough search for other sources of pain is appropriate.

Center for Healing And Regenerative Medicine

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Risks of Epidural Steroid Injections

With any medical or surgical procedure, there are risks. In the case of epidural steroid injections,, these risks are generally small and infrequent, and may include the following:

- Temporary increase in pain or nerve irritation
- Headache, which may last a few hours to a few days
- Hot / flushed sensation in the face or chest
- Excessive energy, sleeplessness, or irritability for several days
- Itching, bruising, or rash
- Light - headedness, which usually resolves in 15 - 30 minutes
- Fluid retention or mild weight gain
- Nerve or spinal cord compression from an expanding blood clot in the cervical region
- Diabetics may experience elevated blood sugar for several days and dosage adjustments of diabetic medications may be necessary during those days.

General recommendations

- Discontinue all blood thinners, such as Coumadin and anti-inflammatory medication, for several days before the procedure. This decreases the likelihood that a blood clot could form causing spinal cord compression. These may be resumed after the injection.
- Please ensure that transportation home is available following the procedure and allow approximately two hours in all for the procedure, which allows for 30 minutes or more of supervision in the waiting room following the procedure..
- Please empty your bladder prior to the procedure.
- You may eat or drink your normal diet before and after the procedure.
- As with any medical or surgical procedure, patient-physician communication is essential to optimize your outcome. Understanding the above information will help to reduce the chances of any misunderstanding regarding this procedure.
- Try to relax in the days/nights before your procedure.. You will very likely find it minimally uncomfortable, easier than you expected, and very beneficial for your problem.

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PROCEDURE OR INFORMATION YOU HAVE JUST READ, PLEASE ASK A MEDICAL ASSISTANT STAFF OR YOUR DOCTOR WHO WILL BE MORE THAN HAPPY TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS. PLEASE CALL THE OFFICE IF YOU EXPERIENCE ANY UNUSUAL SYMPTOMS AFTER THE PROCEDURE.

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