Epidural Steroid Injections
Patient Education

What is an Epidural Steroid Injection?
Epidural steroid injection is an injection of long-lasting steroid (“cortisone”) in the epidural space. This is the area that surrounds the spinal cord and the nerves coming out of it.

What is the purpose of the injection?
The steroid reduces the inflammation and/or swelling of nerves in the epidural space. This may in turn reduce pain, tingling & numbness and other symptoms caused by nerve inflammation/irritation or swelling.

What do I do to prepare for the procedure?
- Arrange for a responsible adult to accompany you and drive you home after the procedure.
- Follow your doctor’s instruction regarding any blood thinners, including Asprin, that you are currently taking.

Will the injection hurt?
The procedure involves inserting a needle through the skin into deeper tissues. The skin and deeper tissues are anesthetized using a very thin needle prior to the injection in order to minimize any discomfort involved.

How is the injection performed?
The procedure will be conducted under Fluoroscopic X-ray guidance. The patient is placed on his/her stomach during the procedure. The injection is done with local anesthesia and occasionally a mild intravenous sedative. The procedure typically takes about 5-10 minutes followed by a brief recovery before going home.

What should I expect after the injection?
Immediately after the injection, you may feel your legs slightly heavy or numb. Also, you may notice that your pain may be gone or quite reduced. This is due to the local anesthetic and will last for a few hours only. Your pain will return and you may have a “sore back” for a day or two. The steroid should begin to work and provide symptom relief within 3 days; however, many can take up to 14 days to feel the effect.

What should I do after the procedure?
You are required to have transportation coordinated on your behalf as you are not permitted to drive, or operate heavy machinery, for 24 hours after the procedure. Additionally, if you under IV sedation, you need to be accompanied by another person for 24 hour observation. We advise the patients to take it easy for a day or so after the procedure. Perform the activities as tolerated by you.

Can I go to work the next day?
Typically, unless there are complications, patients can return to work the following day despite some soreness. If your job requires heavy lifting or for you to operate heavy machinery, you are recommended to wait at least 24 hours after the procedure to do so. If you have specific questions regarding your job duties, please ask your doctor.
What are the risks and side effects?
Although the ESI procedure is considered safe and is a commonly used technique in treating back pain, with any procedure there are risks, side effects, and the possibility of complications. The most common side effect is pain, which is temporary. Other risks sometimes involved with spinal puncture are headaches, infection, bleeding inside the epidural space with nerve damage, worsening of symptoms, etc. Additional risks are related to the side effects of cortisone. These include temporary weight gain, increase in blood sugar (mainly in diabetics), water retention, suppression of the body’s own natural production of cortisone, etc.

How many injections will be necessary?
This will depend on your medical condition and your body’s ability to heal. If you continue to experience pain, we may recommend additional procedures.

If you have questions, be sure to ask your doctor or call Megan McRee at 770-237-3475 x 105, prior to your appointment.