



## **Epidural Steroid Injection**

### **What is an epidural steroid injection?**

An epidural steroid injection (ESI) is an injection of steroid medication near the nerves in your lower back. The medication is injected into the epidural space, an area surrounding the spinal cord and nerves. An ESI may be performed to relieve pain in your neck, arms, legs, chest or lower back. An ESI also may be performed to relieve pain following a case of shingles. By reducing inflammation and decreasing pain, an ESI allows increased function and mobility.

### **What are steroids?**

Steroids (short for corticosteroids) are man-made drugs that closely resemble cortisol, a hormone that your adrenal glands produce naturally. Steroids work by reducing inflammation which in turn can reduce pain. Steroids are used to treat a variety of inflammatory diseases and painful conditions.

### **How is the procedure performed?**

Generally, the procedure is performed in an outpatient surgery center using x-ray imaging, or fluoroscopy. You will be lying on your stomach with blankets covering you while the area for the injection is cleaned with an antiseptic. Using the x-ray, the area of the spine to be targeted is visualized. Your physician will use a local anesthetic or numbing medication to numb the skin over the spine. Once your skin is numb, the physician will direct a small needle into the epidural space and inject a steroid and local anesthetic. The procedure usually takes less than 10 minutes.

### **How effective is an epidural steroid injection?**

If a local anesthetic is used, you may notice pain relief immediately lasting for several hours. It is not unusual for the pain to return once the local anesthetic wears off. The steroid medication usually takes at least 48-72 hours before you will notice improvement in your pain. Regarding duration of pain relief, every patient responds differently. Some patients obtain several weeks of pain relief whereas others may experience months of pain relief. Your pain physician may recommend repeating the epidural steroid injection depending on how you respond to the first injection.

### **What risks are involved with an epidural steroid injection?**

An epidural steroid injection is a fairly low risk procedure and usually is followed by a day of mild soreness at the injection site. However, there are always potential risk when placing a needle in the body. These include bleeding, infection, nerve injury, allergic reaction, worsened pain, and seizure but these are exceedingly rare.

### **What are the side effects of an ESI?**

You may experience any of the following side effects up to 4 hours after the procedure.

- **Leg muscle weakness or numbness.** If you have any leg weakness or numbness, walk only with assistance, as your legs may buckle when trying to walk.
- Numbness and tingling in your chest, abdomen or legs.
- **Dizziness.** Lying down usually helps relieve dizziness, since it is frequently caused by a decrease in your blood pressure. Gradually sit up, then stand after at least 10 minutes of sitting.
- **Mild headache.** Drink fluids and take pain tablets. If the headache persists or becomes severe, call your doctor.
- **Mild discomfort** when the local anesthetic wears off. This usually last two or three hours, if it occurs. Apply ice to the area the day of the procedure and moist heat the day after the procedure if the discomfort persists.

### **What happens after an epidural steroid injection?**

Do not drive or perform any vigorous activity for 12-24 hours after the procedure. You can return to normal activities the following day. You will be able to resume your normal diet and medications. Your physician will schedule your follow up appointment.

### **Is an epidural steroid injection right for me?**

An epidural steroid injection may be right for you if you have pain in your back, leg, neck or arm that has lasted longer than four weeks, is severe or has not improved with other treatments, such as physical therapy. Talk to your physician about your symptoms and he/she will help decide what is right for you.