



HEALTH CONSUMERS'
COUNCIL
YOUR VOICE ON HEALTH

A02lite Epidural Anaesthetic

Expires end of December 2019

A more detailed version of this procedure specific information sheet is available. Please ask your health practitioner at any Western Australian public hospital for a copy.

Write questions or notes here:

This document will give you information about an epidural anaesthetic. If you have any questions, you should ask your GP or other relevant health professional.

What is an epidural anaesthetic?

An epidural anaesthetic (or epidural) involves injecting local anaesthetics and other painkillers into an area called the epidural space, near your spinal cord. This numbs your nerves to give pain relief in certain areas of your body. An epidural can be used either on its own while you are awake, or together with sedation or a general anaesthetic. An epidural can also be used after an operation or procedure to give effective pain relief.

The epidural can be maintained by giving extra doses or by giving a continuous low dose.

How is an epidural given?

Your anaesthetist will insert an epidural catheter using a needle (see figure 1). They will inject a small amount of anaesthetic through the catheter to check the position. Once they have completed this check, they will give more of the anaesthetic until the epidural is working properly.

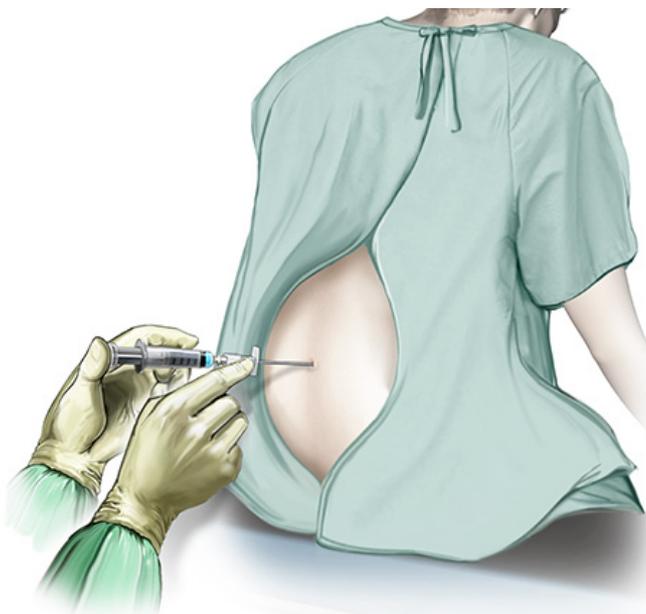


Figure 1

An epidural being given

The effect of the epidural can be varied by changing the type and amount of medication given.

What complications can happen?

- Failure of the epidural
- Low blood pressure

- Headache
- Respiratory depression
- Itching
- Difficulty passing urine
- Temporary leg weakness
- Backache
- Seizures
- Unexpected high block
- Infection around your spine
- Cardiovascular collapse
- Blood clot around your spine
- Damage to nerves
- Paralysis or death

Summary

An epidural anaesthetic can be used for most people, usually giving a safe and effective form of pain relief both during and after an operation or procedure.

Acknowledgements

Author: Dr Iain Moppett DM MRCP FRCA

Illustrations: Medical Illustration Copyright © Nucleus Medical Art. All rights reserved. www.nucleusinc.com

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you.