

ACUTE PAIN SERVICE

HAVING AN EPIDURAL AFTER YOUR OPERATION

What is an epidural?

An epidural is a special type of injection, which may be used after surgery to control your pain. A very thin tube is inserted into your lower back, and through this tube an injection of a painkilling drug can be given directly into the lining of your spinal cord. The tube will probably be inserted on the ward, the day before your operation, or in the Anaesthetic Room before or after you are asleep.

What does it do?

The painkiller will help to numb the area where you have had your operation, and, therefore, ensure excellent pain relief.

What to expect when you wake up

- Different machines around your bed
- A blood pressure cuff on your arm which will tighten every 15 minutes. This is attached to a monitoring machine.
- An oxygen mask over your face
- You will be sitting upright – to help your epidural and to help your breathing
- Drips going into your neck and arm
- A tube going into your bladder
- A nurse regularly monitoring your progress and your pain relief

What can you do to help?

- Deep breathing and coughing exercises – to stop you getting a chest infection
- Leg exercises – to stop you getting clots in your legs. Your nurse will explain these for you
- Tell someone straight away if you have any discomfort or pain, either when you are still, or if you move or cough
- Tell someone if you feel any numbness in your arms, shoulders or legs. This may mean that you are getting too much painkiller into your spinal cord. It is nothing to worry about, but staff need to know about it.
- Changing your position in bed will help to stop you from getting bedsores. Nurses will help you with this for the first few days following your operation
- The nurses may sit you out in a chair and help you to take a short walk on the day after your operation

How long will the epidural be in for?

Your Epidural will be in your back for about 3 days after your operation

When it is taken out a different type of painkiller will be used which will relieve any discomfort or pain you may have.

If this painkiller does not relieve your pain, please let your nurse know

Will it hurt when it is taken out?

No – There are no stitches holding the tube in place – only some tape. The epidural tube will be taken out on the ward, by one of the nurses. The tape is removed, then the tube is taken out and plaster is put over the top

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