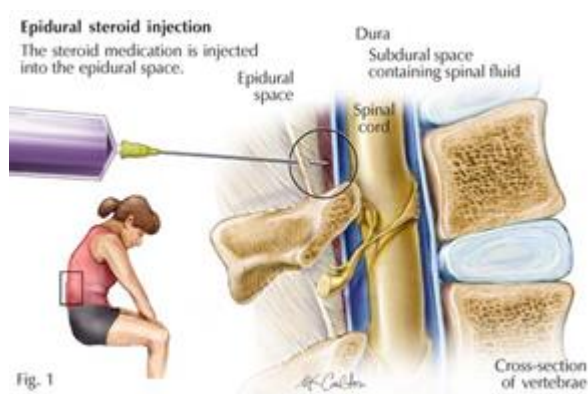


Your doctor has recommended you have an epidural steroid injection as a way of treating your pain which is caused by irritation of the spinal nerves.

The epidural space lies close to the spinal cord and is an area filled with fat cells and blood vessels. Its position close to the spinal cord makes it a convenient place to inject an anti-inflammatory steroid medication.



[http://www.hughston.com/hha/b\\_17\\_1\\_3a.jpg](http://www.hughston.com/hha/b_17_1_3a.jpg)

### Will an Epidural Steroid Injection help me?

It is difficult to predict if the injection will help or not. A steroid injection will not change the existing condition although it can break the cycle of pain and inflammation and allow the body to compensate for the condition. In this way, the injections can provide benefits that outlast the effects of the steroid itself.

### Do I need to arrange anything before my injection?

The injection is usually done as an outpatient. Do not have anything to eat for at least 6 hours and do not drink anything for 2 hours before your appointment before time. Your appointment will last approximately 1½ hours in total, although the actual injection will only take 10-20 minutes.

You will be able to go home on the same day that you have your injection. However you will not be able to drive a car, take a taxi or use public transport by yourself.

You will need to arrange for a responsible adult to accompany you home and to stay with you for the first 24 hours following your procedure / infusion. It is essential that you have access to a telephone during this time.

For your own safety we cannot do the injection unless you have made these arrangements.

### Will the injection hurt?

There will be some discomfort as the procedure involves inserting a needle through the skin and deeper tissues. We numb the skin and deeper tissues using a very thin needle before inserting the Epidural needle. You may feel strong pressure.

### After the injection

You may notice that your pain may be lessened or gone. As well as the steroid solution, a local anaesthetic may have been injected into the epidural space. In this case your legs may feel slightly heavy and may be numb. This is similar to numbing from dental procedures and is due to the anaesthetic injected. It will only last a few hours.

Your pain may return and you may have a sore back for a day or two.

### What are the risks involved and the possible side effects?

Epidural steroid injections have been performed for many decades and are generally considered a safe and effective treatment for back and leg pain. However as with any procedure there are risks, side effects or possible complications. The most common side effect is temporary worsening of your leg /back pain.

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The epidural can affect the nerves that supply your bladder. This can lead to difficulty in passing urine (known as retention). Your bladder function will return to normal after a few hours when the local anaesthetic solution in the epidural space wears off.

The local anaesthetic can affect the nerves going to the blood vessels and your blood pressure may drop. This is easily treatable with intravenous fluid or drugs.

Side effects of the steroid used include possible weight gain, water retention, increased blood pressure (lasting 1-2 days) and increased blood sugar (lasting 1-2 days).

Patients with diabetes should monitor their blood sugars closely as you may need to increase your insulin requirements for several days after the injection. Your diabetes clinical nurse specialist can advise you on this.

Occasionally you may experience a severe headache should the epidural needle go slightly too far and puncture a sac containing spinal fluid. This is known as a 'dural tap'. If the headache continues despite the use of simple painkillers, then the doctors may perform what is known as 'an epidural blood patch'. This involves injecting a small amount of your own blood into the epidural space to plug the hole in the epidural lining. This is almost always immediately effective.

Other possible effects are infection or worsening of symptoms. A rare complication involved with the injection is the possibility of bleeding in the Epidural space with nerve damage.

## Who should NOT have the injections?

If you are allergic to any of the medications involved in the procedure, if you are on a blood thinning medication, or if you have an active ongoing infection, you should not have the injection.

## Will I need to have further injections?

Your doctors will discuss this with you.

## Can I bring a support person with me?

You are welcome to bring family or a support person to wait with you during your injection. Space in the department is limited and you are asked to be considerate and respect the privacy and rights of the other patients. Your family / support person will not be able to go into the Recovery room areas.

## Security / Valuables

We recommend that any valuables are left at home e.g. valuable jewellery or large amounts of money. Please be aware that all items are brought into hospital at your own risk. We are unable to take responsibility for any of your belongings or valuables. Do not leave valuables unattended.

## What should I do if I feel unwell afterwards?

If you feel unwell after the procedure /Injection:

### *During office hours*

Monday – Friday 8am -5pm. Please contact the Pain Management Service.

### *Out of hours, weekends and Public Holidays*

Please contact your doctor or the after hours surgery.

If you have any questions about the procedure / Injection or the information you have just read, the nursing staff or your doctor who will be more than happy to answer them.

## Contact us

Pain Management Service  
Ward Support Block  
Level 10  
Wellington Hospital

Telephone: (04) 385 5344  
Fax: (04) 385 5509