Epidural Steroid Injection
General and Discharge Information

What is an epidural steroid injection?
This is a procedure done to help control pain or numbness from nerve irritation.

What causes nerve irritation?
There can be many causes, for example:
• As we age, several parts of the back can break down, causing bulging or bone spurs. These can push into either the spinal cord (spinal stenosis) or into the opening where nerves leave the spine. This irritates the nerves, causing pain, numbness, weakness, or tingling.
• The disc between the bones in the back may be “bulging” into the nerve area, due to injury or breaking down with age. Bone spurs due to arthritis can push into these areas.
• Scar tissue and changes after neck or back surgery may irritate the nerves as well.

Where is the epidural space?
It is located along the entire length of the spinal canal. The nerves pass through this space as they exit the spine. Injecting steroid (cortisone) medicine into this space may help relieve irritation, soreness and swelling of the nerves at and near this level.

Where is the injection given?
An MRI, CT scan or your symptoms (where it hurts) will direct the doctor to the area causing pain. There are 3 places the injection may be given to you:
• Along the middle of your spine.
• On either side of your spine
• Up through your tailbone

How is the procedure done?
It can be done as an outpatient procedure or in the hospital. Before the procedure, tell your doctor if you have any allergies or are taking any blood thinners.
• You will lie on your abdomen on an X-ray table.
• The area to be injected will be cleansed with an antiseptic solution, which will feel cold. Then the area will be numbed with local anesthetic (you’ll feel a “pin prick” and slight burning).
• Using X-ray guidance, the doctor will inject the steroid along with saline or local anesthetic, into the epidural space. You may feel some pressure, but there should not be pain.

After the procedure
You will be observed for about 15 minutes in the recovery area. The affected arm or leg may feel temporary numbness, tingling or warmth. You may want to bring a driver with you the first time until you see how you react to the injection. Some doctors require a driver; ask your doctor.
The steroid will take 24 to 48 hours to begin to work, with peak effect in 3 to 5 days. You and your doctor will decide if a second injection should be done, depending on how you feel. You may receive a total of 3 epidural injections over 6 to 12 months. We will go over discharge instructions before you leave.

Continued
Discharge Instructions

You were given a number of medicines during the procedure. These may include sedatives, local anesthetics, steroids and other medicines. Any of these drugs or the procedure itself can cause side effects, including drowsiness, temporary numbness, weakness and soreness.

You may feel temporary numbness, weakness or tingling:
• In the neck, arm, or fingertips (if your procedure was done in your neck)
• In the legs (if your procedure was done in your lower back)

What should I do when I get home?
• Rest for a few hours as needed.
• Walk with help as long as numbness, weakness or drowsiness is present.
• Resume activities as tolerated; do not overdo it.
• Resume your regular diet.
• Avoid driving until numbness and the weakness wears off.
• Follow your doctor’s instructions about going back to work. Often patients return to work the same or next day.

Other instructions
• Take your medicines as usual. If you stopped taking your blood-thinning medicine, check with your doctor about taking this again.
• You may apply ice for 15 minutes on and 60 minutes off.
• The injection may cause increased pain for 1 to 2 days. Use your pain medicines as usual.
• The steroid medication may take 24 to 48 hours to start relieving pain. Peak pain relief occurs in 3 to 5 days.
• You may remove the bandage after several hours.
• You may bathe or shower the next day. A small bruise and tenderness at the injection site is normal for 1 to 2 days. Avoid hot tubs or whirlpool tubs with jet sprays for 72 hours.
• If you are diabetic, your blood glucose may increase for several days. Call your primary doctor if the blood sugar levels concern you.

Call us if you have:
• Excessive or abnormal bleeding, persistent chills, or fever over 100º F
• A major change in the pattern or level of your pain
• A severe headache that does not go away with usual treatment methods

In case of emergency, call your doctor. If you cannot reach a doctor, go to the nearest Emergency Room and ask them to call your doctor.