Epidural Blood Patch: What to Expect

What is an epidural blood patch?
An epidural blood patch involves using blood to “patch” an area where fluid is leaking in the spinal column. This leakage can happen if the outer lining of the spinal column (dura) is punctured as a result of certain procedures.

A “spinal” headache may occur from this leakage. The headache is first treated with several days of fluids, bed rest and medication. But if it persists, it can be treated with an epidural blood patch. This procedure is 90% effective in lessening a spinal headache within 30-45 minutes.

How is it done?
The procedure consists of taking blood out of your arm and placing it into the space where the needle punctured through. Often this is done on an x-ray table as you lay on your side or stomach. Depending on your condition, you may have IV fluids given. Usually sedation is not needed for this procedure.

What about after the procedure?
Follow these guidelines for the next 24 hours:

Activity: Rest and relax for 24 hours! Avoid vigorous activities to prevent the blood patch (scab) from coming off before the leakage site seals off. If this happens, the symptoms could return and you may need a repeat procedure.

Fluids: Drink lots of fluids while you’re resting. This will help your body replace the spinal fluid that was leaking. Caffeinated drinks (coffee, tea, soda) seem to be very good for reducing headache from leaking spinal fluid.

Pain Medicine (analgesics): Your doctor will tell you what over-the-counter or prescription medicines you may need to take. Take your other medicines as usual, unless you are told otherwise. Pain medicines may help you with the low backache you’ll probably have for a few days. The backache comes from the blood injected to the patch, which can irritate the tissues around it. Along with taking the pain medicine, you may apply ice for the first 24 hours, then warm moist heat for comfort.

Call your doctor right away if you have:
• Increasing headaches
• Back or neck discomfort and stiffness
• Fever (over 100° F)

Band-aids: You may remove the small band-aid at your back and at your arm (from the blood draw) several hours after the procedure. You may shower or bathe as desired, but no jacuzzi or pulsating spray to the area.

Follow-up: Your doctor or clinic may want you to call the next day to let them know how you are doing.