

Epidural Steroid Injection

Introduction

Epidural space is wrapped around the spinal fluid sack and spinal nerves like an empty donut ring. If spinal nerves are swelled and/or pinched by the inflammation, herniated disc or narrowing of the spinal canal you can experience pain. Steroids, a type of anti-inflammatory medication injected into the epidural space may decrease swelling so the nerve is no longer irritated or pinched and your pain may improve.

How is it done?

To perform the injection, you will be positioned on your stomach. The skin overlying the procedure site will be numbed with injection of local anesthetic and then special needle will be inserted under the X-Ray guidance into your epidural space. You may feel a strong sensation of pressure or cramping in your back, legs or buttocks. The injected fluid putting extra pressure on the swollen nerves causes this.

What is the recovery like?

Steroids can take days to weeks to decrease the swelling and inflammation and the results may not be apparent right away. You will be scheduled for total of three injections 2-3 weeks apart. By the time your third injection is done you should know whether this treatment is going to give you enough of the long-term benefit or other options for your treatment need to be considered.

Benefit Vs Risks

There are certain side effects and /or complications you need to be aware of:

1. The injected area may be sore or bruised for several days. It's usually well resolved
2. You may have a minor muscle spasm in the area of injection. This is usually controlled well with application of the icepack or Tylenol
3. You may have increase in symptoms for several days until steroids begin to work
4. Rarely, "spinal headache" may occur. It usually results from inadvertent puncture of the sleeve holding the spinal fluid in place. This may cause severe headache for several days, blurred vision and/or ringing in the ears. These symptoms will usually go away in 3-7 days. Treatment may range from bed rest, plenty of beverages containing caffeine, Tylenol etc. to specialized procedures that are usually very effective.
5. You may have temporary increase in your blood sugar and/or labile blood pressure if you are suffering from diabetes or prone to hypertension. This is due to the side effects of steroids and usually requires an adjustment of your medications for several days.
6. There is very small risk of infection or bleeding into the epidural space.

Those may be serious complications requiring emergency surgery. Fortunately its exceedingly rare occurrence.

However, it's very important that you inform APMC staff if you are taking any blood thinning medications including aspirin like drugs. Those would need to be discontinued several days prior to the procedure.

What to do after epidural steroid injection?

1. Continue your medication. Do not stop or decrease the dose until you are instructed to do so by your doctor.
2. Continue all exercises prescribed by physical therapy. You can exert yourself to tolerance. This activity is very important for the recovery of function.
3. You may return to work the next day. However, on the day of the procedure do not drive and do not walk outside unless you are accompanied by an adult friend or family member.
4. Follow the discharge instructions and call APMC (503) 295-0730 if you have any questions.