



# Epidural Steroid Injection

*What to expect from your procedure*

**This handout explains an epidural steroid injection. This is a diagnostic test in which a steroid medicine and a local anesthetic are injected into the space around your spinal cord and nerves. It is done to ease pain.**

**You will need to keep a diary of your pain symptoms for 1 week after your procedure.**

## **What is an epidural steroid injection?**

An epidural steroid injection (ESI) is a minimally invasive treatment in which a steroid medicine and a local *anesthetic* (numbing medicine) are injected into the *epidural space*. The epidural space is the space around the spinal cord and nerves.

Steroids are strong medicines used to ease pain. They lessen the inflammation that causes pain. They are used to treat many inflammatory conditions. The local anesthetic helps give you pain relief right away. But, it may take up to a week before the steroids start to ease your pain.

## **How is it done?**

The doctor will use local anesthetic to numb the skin where the needle will be inserted. The doctor then uses X-ray or ultrasound to help guide the needle to the correct nerve. When the needle is inserted, you may feel tingling or a deep ache. You will tell the doctor when this happens.

To make sure the injection is done in the right place, the doctor will ask you questions at times during the procedure. When the doctor is sure the needle is in the right place, the anesthetic medicine is injected. You may feel some discomfort, tingling, or pressure from the injection.

You may receive a light sedation for this procedure, but you will stay awake so that you can talk with the doctor.

## **How long does ESI take?**

ESI takes about 15 minutes, but plan to spend 1 or 2 hours at the clinic from the time you are admitted until you leave.

## **Side Effects**

There is a risk for side effects with any medical procedure. Talk with your doctor about side effects before having any treatment.

Possible side effects from ESI are:

- Pain at the injection site.
- Infection.
- Bleeding.
- Nerve injury.
- Allergic reaction.
- Headache.
- Not being able to pass urine.
- More pain than usual.

## **How to Prepare for ESI**

### *Medicine Changes*

**You must stop taking blood-thinning medicines such as warfarin (Coumadin), clopidogrel (Plavix), enoxaparin (Lovenox), and others before having this procedure.** If you are taking blood-thinning medicine, talk with your doctor who prescribed the medicine as soon as your ESI is scheduled.

You may keep taking low-dose aspirin and anti-inflammatory medicines.

### *On the Day of the Procedure*

Note: You may eat and drink as usual if you will **not** receive sedation.

#### **For all patients:**

- Wear loose, comfortable clothing.
- Arrive at least 30 minutes before your appointment.
- It is best to bring someone with you who can drive you home.
- If you are on a long-acting or slow-release pain medicine, your pain doctor may tell you how to reduce your medicine to prepare for the test.
- Do **not** take any short-acting pain medicine such as oxycodone/acetaminophen (Percocet), acetaminophen (Tylenol), or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) the day of your procedure.
- **If your blood pressure is high and not well-controlled, your ESI may need to be scheduled for another time.**

## Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.:

Call the Center for Pain Relief at 206-598-4282.

After hours and on weekends and holidays:

Call 206-598-6190 and ask for the Pain Fellow on call to be paged.

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### If you will be receiving sedation:

- You **must** bring someone with you who can drive you home after the procedure.
- Starting 8 hours before your appointment:
  - Do **not** eat any solid food.
  - For the first 4 hours, you may drink only clear liquids.
  - For the 4 hours before your appointment, do **not** drink anything.
  - If you need to take any medicines during this time, take them with only a small sip of water.

### We will not be able to give you sedation if you do not follow these diet guidelines.

- **If you will be receiving sedation and you have diabetes**, you must also ask your diabetes care provider how to manage your medicines the morning of your procedure since you will be fasting.

### When can I resume my usual activities?

- If you had sedation, do not drive or use machinery for 24 hours after your ESI.
- If you have pain relief after your procedure, do not start doing all the activities you have not been able to do because of your pain. Remember, you still have the underlying problem that caused your pain. If you overdo it, your pain may return quickly, even within a few days of feeling better.
- It is important to do an exercise program that slowly strengthens the muscles you have not been able to use because of your pain. It will take time to build up your strength.

### Follow-up

You will go home with the *Patient Self-Reported 1-Week Pain Diary*. You will use this to record your pain levels after your procedure.

One week after your ESI, you **must** call the clinic to report your results. **Your follow-up appointment will not be scheduled until you have made this call.**

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