

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.

Obstetric Anesthesia:
206-598-4616

the proper treatment if you need it.

Call **206-598-4616 right away** and ask to talk with an Obstetric Anesthesia Resident if you:

- Have another headache.
- Have continued pain in your back or legs.
- Develop a fever.
- Have any weakness or numbness in your arms or legs.
- Get double vision.

Remember

- Epidural and spinal anesthetics for childbirth are safe.
- We do not expect you to have any problems with future epidural or spinal anesthetics.

We are here to answer any questions you may have. Call us at 206-598-4616.



Headache

After your epidural or spinal anesthetic

This handout covers what you need to know if you have a severe headache after you've had an epidural or spinal anesthetic for labor pain or a Cesarean section.

Dural Puncture Headaches

When an epidural is placed, a local anesthetic is injected into a space outside the sac (*dura*) that contains the fluid surrounding the spinal cord. Rarely, the *dura* is punctured by the needle and some fluid leaks out of the hole.

When this occurs, you may develop a headache known as a *post-dural puncture headache*. This headache typically occurs within 48 hours after delivery of your baby and usually lasts less than a week. It can also happen after a *spinal* anesthetic, but much less often.

Mild headaches are common after childbirth, but this type is usually more severe, gets better when lying down and worse when sitting or standing. You may also feel nauseous, have some neck stiffness, and be bothered by bright lights. The headache is not dangerous, but it can make caring for your newborn baby difficult.



Treatment

Most dural puncture headaches will eventually get better by themselves, with no treatment.

Bed rest, plenty of fluids, and oral pain medicines such as Tylenol or Motrin, may cure the headache. Caffeine, taken by mouth or injected into your veins (*intravenously*), can also help.

Epidural Blood Patch

If your headache does not get better in 1 or 2 days, we can give you an *epidural blood patch*. This is like having another epidural and takes about 30 minutes. It involves injecting **your own sterile blood** into the epidural space to plug the hole in the *dura* and stop the fluid leak.

After an epidural blood patch:

- Lie flat for 1 to 4 hours.
- Avoid straining. **Do not** lift anything heavier than your baby for up to 1 week.

If the headache does not ease within 24 hours, one more blood patch may be done. It is very rare to need more than 2 blood patches.

Side Effects

During and after the epidural blood patch, you may have aching or mild pain in your back or legs, and some neck stiffness. These side effects are normal.

When to Call the Doctor

Ongoing problems after a dural puncture are very rare. But, we want to make sure that you receive