

# EMORY PAIN CENTER

## Epidural Steroid Injection

**What is the epidural space?** The epidural space is a potential space that surrounds the spinal sac and provides cushioning for the spinal cord. It is the portion of the spine where the inflamed nerve roots are located.

**What are the indications for an epidural steroid injection (ESI)?** Neck or back pain often develops as a result of arthritis affecting your spine or a misaligned discs that irritates spinal nerve roots. These symptoms can be present in all three parts of your spine - cervical (neck), thoracic (mid-back), and lumbar (low back). You may also get pain, tingling and numbness that goes down your arms or legs. When medications and physical therapy fail to improve your symptoms, an epidural steroid injection can be used to help improve the pain and your daily function. Conditions that can be treated with ESI include spinal stenosis, arthritis of the spine, degenerated discs, and a protruding or herniated disc. Some patients with pain due to scar tissue or various changes after back or neck surgery may be candidates for an ESI.

**What is an epidural steroid injection (ESI)?** An ESI is a combination of a steroid and a local anesthetic that is deposited into the epidural space via a needle or catheter. The steroid is a strong anti-inflammatory medicine that relieves swelling, takes pressure off your nerves and relieves pain. The local anesthetic will give you immediate pain relief, while the steroid will give you long-term relief.

**How is an epidural steroid injection performed?** An IV will be placed prior to the procedure to provide relaxing medicine if needed. During the procedure, you will be asked to lie on your stomach or on your back. The skin will be numbed with a local anesthetic agent. Fluoroscopy (x-ray) is used to precisely guide the needle into the epidural space. A contrast dye is injected to confirm the needle location. Next the steroid and a local anesthetic is injected. You may feel pressure when the medicine is being injected. The procedure usually takes 15 to 30 minutes followed by a short recovery period.

**What are the side effects/risks of an epidural steroid injection?** Complications are rare but they include infection, bleeding or nerve damage. Most common complaint is temporary pain near the injection site. Some patients may have headaches after an ESI. If this happens and persists, your doctor should be notified.

**How effective is an epidural steroid injection?** An ESI is generally successful in reducing pain for a significant number of patients. Some patients may need more than one injection to improve the pain. The duration of pain relief varies from person to person.