Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Epidural Analgesia

This information explains epidural analgesia (ep-pee-DUR-al an-al-GEE-sia) and the procedure to place an epidural catheter.

About epidural analgesia

Epidural analgesia is pain medicine you get through your epidural space (the space in your spine just outside your spinal cord). You get this medicine through a plastic catheter (thin, flexible tube).

Epidural analgesia has fewer side effects than medicine that's given through an intravenous (IV) line. For example, when you have epidural analgesia, you're less likely to have:

- Nausea (feeling like you're going to throw up)
- Vomiting (throwing up)
- Fatigue (feeling more tired or weak than usual)

Having your epidural catheter placed

Before your epidural catheter is placed, you'll meet with a doctor who's a pain specialist. They'll explain the procedure and answer your questions. They'll also place an IV line in a vein in your arm. You'll get medicine through the IV to make you relaxed and sleepy. A nurse will monitor your heart, breathing, and blood pressure.

While you sit on the bed, your doctor will ask you to bend forward, so your back is curved like the letter "C." They'll give you a shot of medicine to numb the area of your back where the epidural catheter will be placed. It may burn for a few seconds, but then it will get numb. Once your back is numb, your doctor will use

a needle to find the right area and place the catheter. You may feel pressure in your back while this is happening, but you shouldn't feel much pain.

Once the catheter is in place, your doctor will test it with a small amount of medicine. Once your doctor sees the medicine is working, they'll take out the needle. You'll then lie back in the bed. The catheter will stay in your back, securely taped.

After your epidural catheter is placed

You'll get the resource *Patient-Controlled Analgesia (PCA)* (www.mskcc.org/pe/pca). It explains how you can give yourself pain medicine through your epidural catheter. Your healthcare provider will see you every day after your surgery. They'll check your pain level and your epidural catheter. They'll also adjust your pain medicine, catheter, or both, to keep you comfortable.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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