Epidural Steroid Injection

This information will help you get ready for your epidural steroid injection (shot) at Memorial Sloan Kettering (MSK).

About Epidural Steroid Injections

Your vertebrae (the individual bones in your back) are separated by rubbery cushions called discs. If a disc bulges (moves out of place), it can irritate and inflame your spinal nerves. This causes back and nerve pain. A steroid injection can help decrease nerve swelling, which may help to reduce your pain.
Your epidural space goes from the base of your head to the part of your spine that’s below your hips (see Figure 1). A steroid may be injected into any area of your epidural space. Your pain doctor will decide the best location for your injection based on where your pain is.

1 Week Before Your Procedure

Ask about your medications

You may need to stop taking some medications before your procedure. We have included some common examples below.

- If you take medication to thin your blood, ask the doctor who prescribes it for you when to stop taking it. Some examples are warfarin (Coumadin®), dalteparin (Fragmin®), heparin, tinzaparin (Innohep®), enoxaparin (Lovenox®), clopidogrel (Plavix®), and cilostazol (Pletal®).

- If you take insulin or other medications for diabetes, you may need to change the dose. Ask the doctor who prescribes your diabetes medications what you should do the morning of your procedure.

Arrange for someone to take you home

You must have a responsible care partner take you home after your procedure. Make sure to plan this before the day of your procedure.

If you don’t have someone to take you home, call one of the agencies below. They will send someone to go home with you. There’s usually a charge for this service, and you will need to provide transportation.

Agencies in New York
Partners in Care: 888-735-8913
Caring People: 877-227-4649

Agencies in New Jersey
Caring People: 877-227-4649

1 Day Before Your Procedure

If you have a fever of 100.5°F (38°C) or higher, call the doctor who scheduled your steroid injection.
The Day of Your Procedure

Starting 4 hours before your procedure, do not eat or drink anything. This includes water, gum, and hard candy.

What to bring with you

- A list of the medications you take at home
- Medications for pain

Where to park

MSK’s parking garage is located on East 66th Street between York and First Avenues. If you have questions about prices, call 212-639-2338.

To reach the garage, turn onto East 66th Street from York Avenue. The garage is located about a quarter of a block in from York Avenue, on the right-hand (north) side of the street. There’s a tunnel that you can walk through that connects the garage to the hospital.

There are also other garages located on East 69th Street between First and Second Avenues, East 67th Street between York and First Avenues, and East 65th Street between First and Second Avenues.

Where to go

Your procedure will take place at MSK’s main building. The best entrance to use is the entrance located at 425 East 67th Street, between York and First avenues.

At the hospital, take the A elevator to the 3rd floor. Your procedure will take place in room A341.

What to expect

Once you arrive at the hospital, you’ll be asked to say and spell your name and birth date many times. This is for your safety. People with the same or a similar name may be having surgery on the same day. You may be asked to change into...
a hospital gown and remove any necklaces, chains, and earrings you’re wearing. A pain doctor will review the procedure with you and answer your questions.

When it’s time for your procedure, you’ll be helped onto the x-ray table and helped to lie on your stomach with a pillow under your belly. Using fluoroscopy (a type of x-ray), your doctor will find the best spot in your back to place the epidural and inject the steroid.

When the right location is found, you’ll get an injection of local anesthetic (medication to make an area of your body numb). You may feel a small pinprick and then a burning sensation. Your doctor will then place the epidural in the area where the local anesthetic was injected. Once your doctor is sure that the needle is correctly placed, they will inject the steroid. The needle will be removed and a bandage will be placed over your injection site.

This procedure takes 45 to 60 minutes to complete.

**After Your Procedure**

**At home**

For the first 24 hours after your procedure:

- Don’t shower
- Don’t drink alcoholic beverages
- Don’t drive or do any other task where you need to be alert
- Don’t remove the bandage from your injection site. You can remove it 24 hours after your procedure.
- Take your pain medication as prescribed.

Your pain may increase for up to 24 hours after your injection. This is normal. You may take an extra dose of your pain medication to help relieve your pain. If your pain continues longer than 48 hours, call your doctor.

It may take 3 days or more before you feel the steroid injection working.
Side effects
Some people have side effects after getting an epidural steroid injection. The most common side effects are:

- Headaches
- Temporary weakness, numbness, or tingling in your arms and legs
- Some soreness at your injection site
- A feeling of fullness in your back
- Sleeplessness

When to Call Your Healthcare Provider

Call your healthcare provider if you have:

- A fever of 100.5° F (38.0° C) or higher
- Pain that gets worse after 48 hours or changes locations
- Shooting, burning or tightness in your back or legs
- Leakage, redness, or swelling at the site where you got the steroid injection
- Any unexplained or unexpected problems

If you have any questions, contact a member of your healthcare team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5:00 PM, during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

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