

Epidural Catheter for Back Surgery (Microdiscectomy, ALIF)

This handout explains the types of anesthesia used for back surgery. It is best to partner with your surgeon and anesthesia doctor to choose the best pain relief for you.

The two types of anesthesia used for micro-disc or ALIF back surgery are general and regional. Both are safe and good choices. Your options will be discussed with you on the day of surgery.

General: You will be fully asleep and have a breathing tube.

Regional: Epidural blocks are used. Medicine is put in your back that will stop the feeling in your legs for 2-3 hours. You will also get medicine to help you nap. Most people do not recall their surgery. It may depend on your level of sedation.

Note: an epidural catheter is not the same as an epidural steroid shot.

	General	Epidural
Will I be awake?	You will be fully asleep and have a breathing tube.	You will be given medicine to help you nap but will not be fully asleep.
Pros	You will be fully asleep and will not remember anything	You will not be fully asleep and will not need a breathing tube. This can help reduce nausea, have better pain control and wake up faster after surgery.
Cons	You may feel nauseous and sleepy when you wake up	You will have to wait for the numbness to wear off
Risks	Nausea Sleepy Sore Throat Dental Damage	Nerve Damage Bleeding Infection Headache

What to Expect

Some things are the same whether you have general anesthesia or an epidural.

Pre-Op Area

This is where you will start your day. While in this area, you will:

1. Talk about your health and anesthesia plan with your anesthesia doctor.
2. Have an IV placed.
3. Meet the OR nurses and the rest of your team.
4. Get medicine in your IV to help you relax.

The Operating Room (OR)

This is where the surgery takes place. When in the OR, you will:

1. Be moved onto a bed and have monitors placed.
2. Confirm your name, birthday, surgery, and allergies with the team.

General Anesthesia Steps

1. Take deep breaths of oxygen and get IV medicine that will make you sleepy.
2. Have a breathing tube put in after you fall asleep.
3. Placed on your stomach. We will support and cushion your arms, neck, and legs.
4. When surgery is over we will take out the breathing tube and wake you up. People often do not recall anything until the recovery room.
5. A nurse will take care of you in the recovery room.

Epidural

An epidural is a small catheter or tube placed just outside the spinal cord (called the epidural space). It helps medicine get close to the nerve roots and numb nerves that supply feeling to the area you are having surgery. They work the same as the medicine dentists use to numb your mouth.

Epidural Steps

1. You will be taken to the pre-op area and asked to lay on your side or sit at the side of the bed.
2. You will get medicine in your IV to help you relax.
3. Your back is cleaned with germ-free soap.
4. A numbing medicine is placed on your skin where the needle will go.
5. The needle is gently pushed into your back and the small, plastic catheter is placed (this catheter is about the width of a guitar string). You should feel very little pain during this.
6. The needle is taken out and the plastic catheter is taped in place.
7. It is okay to lie on your back after this is placed.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 10/2023 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing HF#7294.