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## Epidural Infusion Patient Information Sheet

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### What is an "Epidural"?

An Epidural is a method of pain relief where local anaesthetic is injected continuously through a fine plastic tube, which has been placed in the back. The tip of the tube lies near the nerves transmitting pain sensations at the place where the nerves enter the backbone.

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### Why have an Epidural?

An epidural infusion can provide you with the best form of pain relief known to us. Commonly they are used with childbirth, but more recent advances in specialised care have seen them used in the postoperative setting and for certain operations

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### What are the Benefits?

Potentially you will experience superior pain relief, fewer side effects, less drowsiness and be clearer headed after surgery. Also, epidural infusion pain relief can hasten recovery after surgery, patients enjoy greater comfort, get well faster and have fewer complications related to surgery.

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### What are the Side Effects?

In addition to preventing most of the pain, epidurals **may** create some of the following:

- A cold, numb, heavy, weak or tingling feeling on the area where the epidural is working.
- A drop in blood pressure and/or heart rate, which may cause dizziness especially when standing.
- Itching
- Nausea
- Inability to sense when the bladder is full: this may require a urinary catheter.

These side effects are expected to wear off when the epidural is discontinued.

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### **How long will I have the pain for?**

This is individual and often depends upon the surgery and your progress. Commonly Epidural infusions remain in progress for 2 to 3 days.

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### **How will I be monitored?**

Your nurse will monitor you closely to ensure you get good pain relief and that side effects are kept to a minimum.

This is done by:

- (a) asking you to rate your level of comfort (0) no pain to (10) worst pain imaginable.
  - (b) by taking blood pressure, pulse and other observations which are done regularly while you are having the Epidural.
  - (c) measuring the uppermost level of numbness you may feel which is called the "block level". This is usually done with ice.
  - (d) how much you can move the affected area, as you may need assistance with moving and prevention of pressure area formation.
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### **How is it removed?**

After discussion with the anaesthetist the Epidural infusion will be stopped. Provided you are comfortable the plastic tube will be removed later by the nurse. This is expected to be a quick painless procedure. Should pain occur within that time the Epidural may need to be recommenced for another day or two.