

# Epidural Catheters

## What is an epidural catheter?

Epidural catheters are one way of giving pain relief without injections (shots). During surgery, a thin tube will be put through the skin and threaded into the epidural space (a space just outside of the spinal cord). The tube may be put in near the bottom of your child's back, or the lower or mid-back.

## How is it used?

Most epidural catheters have pain medicines going into them continuously. Older children may also have a button to push that will deliver a pre-set amount of medicine when they feel uncomfortable and need more pain medication. The catheter is connected to tubing and a bag of medicine, and then attached to a pump. In some cases, a nurse or a doctor may give the medicine. The medicine can relieve pain after some surgeries (operations on the chest, abdomen or legs). It may be also used to treat some cancer pain.

## What pain medicine will my child receive?

Medicines given through an epidural catheter include opiates (pain medicine) and local anesthetics (numbing medicine). The amount of medicine a child receives is based on height, weight, location of the surgery and other factors. This may be adjusted, or a different medicine may be used if your child is uncomfortable.

## How does it work?

The pain medicine works by blocking pain messages at the spinal cord.

## How long will it work?

The epidural catheter often remains in place for one to five days. Any pain should be controlled while it is in place. After it is removed, the pain medicine will keep working for four to twenty-four hours, depending on the type of medicine used.

## Are there side effects?

Side effects are always possible when any medicine is given. The side effects include:

- Itching
- Nausea and vomiting
- Inability to urinate
- Drowsiness and slowed breathing
- Heaviness or tingly feeling in the legs while the medicine is being given. The type and amount of medicine can be adjusted if this occurs.

The nurses will be checking your child often for any side effects. The nurses will also check your child's breathing, blood pressure and heart rate. Medicines are ordered to help with side effects if they occur.

## What is my role?

Let the nurses and doctors know if:

- Your child is hurting.
- Your child itches or feels like vomiting.
- The epidural catheter comes out or is accidentally disconnected.

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### Common concerns

Often parents want to know if an epidural catheter will prevent their child from getting out of bed, or prevent them from being able to hold their child. As long as the surgeon says it's okay, your child may get out of bed with an epidural in place if certain precautions are followed. The catheter is well taped and should not fall out. A nurse can assist your child in getting out of bed or teach you how to hold your child. It is important that we check that your child does not have any leg weakness and that they do not get out of bed alone.

### Questions?

All members of the team are here to help your child be comfortable. When a child has an epidural catheter, a member of the Pain Medicine Service visits daily to make sure that the amount of pain medicine is just right to keep your child comfortable. If you have questions, or would like to speak with a Pain Medicine Service team member, ask your child's nurse.

#### TO LEARN MORE

- Pain Medicine Service (206) 987-2704
- Your Child's Health-Care Provider

*Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Please call the Family Resource Center at (206) 987-2201.*

*This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Children's Hospital. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's health-care provider.*