

Using an epidural to relieve your child's pain

What is an epidural?

An epidural is one way to relieve pain. When your child has an epidural, pain medication is put through a soft, thin tube into a small space between the bones in your child's back, near the spinal nerves. The epidural tubing is yellow, so that it looks different from the tubing of your child's intravenous (IV).

Pain medication is given through the end of the tube that is taped near your child's shoulder. Medication may be given in separate doses or continuously with a pump. Depending on the type of medication, it may take 10 to 60 minutes for each dose of medication to start to work. The effects of the medication can last up to 24 hours, even after the epidural is taken out.

The epidural should make your child feel more comfortable. If you feel your child needs more pain medication, tell the nurse.

What activity can my child do with the epidural in place?

With an epidural, your child should feel comfortable enough to practice deep breathing and coughing exercises. The nurse will decide if your child can safely move, get up and walk with the epidural in place.

What special care does my child need?

The ward nurses will regularly check:

- for signs that your child is in pain
- that your child is alert when awake or easily awakened from sleep
- your child's breathing, blood pressure and temperature
- your child's ability to feel and whether there is any numbness
- your child's ability to move and whether there is any weakness
- your child's ability to pass urine
- whether your child has any side effects from the medication
- the site of the epidural and the dressing

These checks will continue during the time the epidural is in place and up to 24 hours after it is removed, depending on the medication that is used.

Your child will also be visited by a doctor or nurse from the Acute Pain Service. They will talk with you about your child's pain management and check your child.

The epidural is taped in place along your child's back. The end of the tubing will be taped to a small board and pinned to the back of your child's hospital gown. If your child is getting continuous medication, the end of the tubing is connected to a pump. It is very important that your child does not play with or pull at any part of the epidural tubing.

How is the epidural removed?

With your child laying down, the nurse will remove the tape and gently pull out the epidural. This is usually not painful, but your child may be a little frightened. The nurse will put a bandage over the place where the epidural was removed. The nurse will tell you when your child can start taking other types of pain medications. Your child's IV may remain in place for 12 to 24 hours after the epidural is removed.

Tell the nurse or doctor if you notice your child:

- is extremely sleepy
- seems confused
- feels sick (nausea)
- has sudden, severe back pain
- has trouble passing urine
- has itchy skin
- has a headache
- has increasing numbness in the legs or feet
- has increasing trouble moving the legs or feet

**If you have any questions about the epidural,
please ask the nurse or doctor.**