

# Epidural anaesthetic – aftercare information and possible complications

## Department of Anaesthetics Patient Information Leaflet

### Introduction

During and after your operation, you had an epidural to control your pain. The epidural was a fine plastic tube inserted into your back through which pain relieving drugs were given to you. The plastic tube has now been removed.

Rarely, complications may occur after having an epidural and this leaflet gives information about these and what to look out for at home.

## What complications can occur?

### **Infection**

An infection may develop where the epidural was sited. This may occur on the surface of the skin or more deeply, close to the spinal cord and nerves. Infections may develop into an abscess which would need urgent treatment with antibiotics and sometimes surgery.

### **Bleeding**

Bleeding may cause a collection of blood which is known medically as an epidural haematoma. This may press on the spinal cord and nerves and cause damage. This condition is extremely rare. If it occurs, urgent surgery may be required to release the pressure on the spinal cord and nerves.

### **Nerve damage**

Permanent nerve damage is a very rare but serious complication of having an epidural. It is usually caused by either infection or bleeding.

## What should I look out for at home?

Once you leave hospital, it is important that you are aware of any symptoms suggesting there may be a complication from the epidural. These include:

- Redness, swelling or pus around the epidural insertion site on your back
- Fever
- Neck stiffness
- Changes in feeling and/or strength in your legs
- New severe pain around the epidural insertion site
- Difficulty in passing urine or inability to control bowel movements

Complications from epidurals need to be treated urgently; therefore, if you have any of these symptoms, you must seek medical advice immediately. Go to your nearest Emergency Department and explain that you have had an epidural recently. Take this information leaflet with you.

## **Headache**

Minor headaches are common after surgery, with or without an epidural. Occasionally, a severe headache occurs after an epidural because the lining of the fluid filled space surrounding the spinal cord has been inadvertently punctured. This is known medically as a dural tap.

This typically occurs between one day and one week after having the epidural. It is usually a severe headache felt at the front or back of your head, which gets worse on sitting or standing. Along with the headache, you may experience neck pain, sickness and a dislike of bright lights. Sometimes this needs to be treated with an injection in your back.

## **Can I find out more?**

You can find further information on the Royal College of Anaesthetists website [www.rcoa.ac.uk](http://www.rcoa.ac.uk) under information for patients.

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please contact:

Inpatient Pain Team on 01384 456111 ext. 2845

You can also ask for us to be bleeped on 7851 (8am to 4pm, Monday to Friday excluding bank holidays)

Russells Hall Hospital switchboard number: 01384 456111

**This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:**

<http://dgft.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/anaesthetics/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email [dgft.patient.information@nhs.net](mailto:dgft.patient.information@nhs.net)

**This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.**

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Ulotka dostępna jest również w dużym druku, wersji audio lub w innym języku. W tym celu zadzwoń pod numer 0800 073 0510.

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Aceasta broșura poate fi pusă la dispoziție tipărită cu caractere mari, versiune audio sau în alte limbi, pentru acest lucru va rugăm sunați la 0800 073 0510.

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