

Types of Low Back Pain and Pain Treatment Options

Low back pain has considerable consequences. In terms of lost productivity, medical expenses and workers compensation benefits, back pain costs tens of billions of dollars annually in the U.S. It afflicts more than 65 million Americans each year and is one of the main reasons patients visit their primary care practitioners.

Epidural Steroid Injection (ESI)

An ESI is a common type of injection that is given to provide relief from certain types of low back and neck pain. The “epidural space” is the space between the covering of the spinal cord (dura mater) and the inside of the bony spinal canal. It runs the entire length of your spine. When injected into this area the medication moves freely up and down the spine to coat the nerve roots and the outside lining of the facet joints near the area of injection. For example, if the injection is given in the lumbar spine, the medication will usually affect the entire lower portion of the spine.

The epidural needle is inserted into the back until the doctor feels sure it is in the epidural space. The doctor will then place a small amount of lidocaine into the epidural space and wait to see if you feel warmth and numbness in your legs. If so, the needle is most likely in the correct position. The remainder of the medication is injected and the needle is withdrawn.

There are three different ways to perform an epidural injection:

- caudal block
- translumbar
- transforaminal

Caudal Block

A caudal block is placed through the sacral gap (a space below the lumbar spine near the sacrum). The injection is placed into the epidural space. This type of block usually affects the spinal nerves at the end of the spinal canal near the sacrum. This collection of nerves is called the cauda equina. One of the benefits of this type of injection is less chance of puncturing the dura.

Translumbar

The translumbar approach is the most common way of performing an epidural injection. This type of injection is performed by placing a needle between two vertebrae from the back. The needle is inserted between the spinous processes of two vertebrae. You can actually feel the bumps that make up the spinous process by feeling along the back of your spine.



Transforaminal

The transforaminal approach is a very selective injection around a specific nerve root. The foraminae are small openings between your vertebrae through which the nerve roots exit the spinal canal and enter the body. By injecting medication around a specific nerve root, the doctor can determine if this nerve root is causing the problem. This type of epidural injection is used most often for diagnostic purposes, and it is commonly used in the neck.



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