How long will I have the Epidural?

Usually pain improves quickly after the operation.

➤ You will need the epidural for about 2 to 4 days after your operation. Other types of pain relief are then available.

➤ The epidural is taken out easily and without pain by your nurse, and the site is covered with a small dressing which is taken off the next day.

If you are unsure about having an epidural, your anaesthetist will discuss this with you and explain all the issues about epidural pain relief in more detail.

Do you have any questions that you may wish to ask your nurse or doctor?

Tell us what you think

We welcome any suggestions to improve this leaflet. You should send these to:

➤ Acute Pain Service (APS)
  Department of Anaesthetics and Pain Medicine
  Mid-Western Regional Hospital
  Dooradoyle
  Limerick

Are there any side effects?

Your nurse will be checking you often to see how well your epidural is working for you and to check for all possible side effects.

➤ While the epidural is in use sometimes there may be a slight fall in your blood pressure. Your blood pressure will be checked often by the nurses. Low blood pressure may cause a light-headed feeling when you first get up. You should sit on the side of your bed for five minutes before trying to stand, with the help of your nurse.

➤ Other possible side effects may be nausea (sick stomach) or itching around your face and chest. Medication can be given to treat these problems if needed.

➤ The epidural may reduce the feeling in your bladder, so if you have trouble passing urine a tube may need to be passed into your bladder to drain the urine. This will be taken out when the epidural stops.

What are the benefits of an Epidural?

➤ An epidural gives the best possible pain control after surgery and helps prevent some problems that may occur after your operation.

➤ Patients with good pain relief get better results after major surgery and fewer problems like chest infections, blood clots and stress on the heart.

➤ With better pain control you can move better and do breathing exercises, which will speed up your recovery.

What is an Epidural?

You may already be aware of epidural pain relief as a method for treating pain during labour. Epidurals can also be used to treat pain after surgery.

➤ Most pain killers act on the brain and spinal cord and they are carried there in the bloodstream.

➤ An epidural catheter is a very fine long plastic tube put in your back by your anaesthetist. It lies close to the spinal cord and spinal nerves and pain medication is given directly at the point where it works so that only small amounts of medication are needed.

➤ The pain killing epidural drugs come in a bag of sterile fluid which is attached to the fine plastic tube in your back. These drugs are given through the epidural tubing using a special pump.

➤ The pump gives a set amount of drug as ordered by your anaesthetist. During more painful periods you can also give yourself extra pain medication if needed by pressing the patient handset.

It is very important that you are the only one to press this patient control button. The pump still controls the total amount of medication given, so it is not possible for you to give yourself too much.

When do I get an Epidural?

Your anaesthetist will place the epidural catheter in your back just before the operation so that it can be used both during and after surgery. This will usually be done while you are awake.