Epidural Anesthesia: Pain Relief for Labor and Delivery

The epidural block is the most common local anesthesia used for delivery. Medicine is injected through a small flexible tube, called a catheter, in the lower back to provide pain relief in the lower abdomen, legs and birth canal. It is also used to relieve pain during a Cesarean delivery. When you and your doctor or nurse midwife feel that your labor is progressing, the anesthesiologist or nurse anesthetist will place the epidural.

About Epidural Pain Relief

- One of two positions is used to open up the space in your lower back where the tube is placed. Your nurse will help you stay in the position during the procedure.
  - You may be asked to lie on your left side and bring your knees up to your stomach as far as possible. You will arch your lower back. A roll will be put under your right hip to move the uterus to the left. This position will result in a good blood flow to the uterus for your baby.
- You may be asked to sit on the side of your bed and lean over a table to round your back.

- The doctor will clean your lower back with an antibacterial soap. Then a numbing medicine is injected into this area of the lower back.

- During this next part, you need to be still. Breathe slowly and deeply. Try to relax and do not move. Use the breathing and relaxation techniques taught in the Childbirth Education Classes. The doctor will put a needle with a tube into the numbed area and position it into the epidural space. The needle will be removed from your lower back and the thin flexible tube will remain in the epidural space.

- After the tube or catheter is in, a small test dose is given. We will watch and check you for 5 to 15 minutes before the full dose is given. Relief from the contractions, vaginal and rectal pain should follow shortly. You will be able to move your legs, although they may feel slightly numb. You may be asked to remain in bed.

**Possible Side Effects**

- Pain relief may vary from total to no pain relief. About 85 out of 100 women get total relief of pain from the epidural block.
• A temporary drop in blood pressure may occur, which can be treated with IV fluids or medicine that can be given safely to you and your baby.

• Epidural anesthesia may slow labor if given too soon. At other times, it may result in labor that is more rapid than usual. In addition, the epidural may slow pushing efforts. The amount of epidural medicine can be increased or decreased as needed to correct this problem.

• Rarely there is the possible side effect of getting a headache after delivery.

Precautions

If you have or had any of these conditions, talk to your doctor or nurse midwife before having an epidural for pain relief.

• Bleeding problems
• Blood pressure problems
• Infection near the site of the needle insertion
• Neurological disorders
• Any lower back surgery
• Drug abuse (cocaine, heroin)

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.