

Headache after an epidural or spinal injection?

What you need to know

After having an epidural or spinal injection, you have between a 1 in 100 and 1 in 200 chance of developing a 'post-dural puncture' headache (PDPH).

What causes the headache?

The brain and spinal cord are surrounded by a fluid filled sac called the dura. The dura may be punctured accidentally when an epidural is being put in or deliberately for a spinal. Fluid may leak from the puncture causing a drop in pressure in the fluid around the brain resulting in a headache.



What is the headache like?

- It starts in the days following your epidural or spinal
- It is often severe
- It is worse on sitting up and better on lying down
- There may also be neck pain
- Bright light may be uncomfortable – prefer a dark room

What is the treatment?



Bed Rest



Drink plenty of fluids and caffeinated drinks



Regular painkillers (such as paracetamol or ibuprofen)



Time (may get better in a few days)



Blood patch (if it doesn't get better or is very severe)

What is a blood patch?

(1) An epidural blood patch is similar to having an epidural or spinal injection and is usually carried out in one of the labour rooms or in the operating theatre by an anaesthetist. It is usually performed more than 24 hours after the puncture has happened.



(2) During the procedure blood is taken from a vein in your arm.



(3) The blood is then injected into the epidural space.



(4) You will be asked to lie down for a few hours after the blood patch to allow the clot to form in the right place. The blood will clot and seal the leak of fluid, to help stop the headache.



What are the side effects of a blood patch?

- About 1 in 5 don't stop the headache so that you might need another one
- There may be pain when the blood is injected into your back
- Your back may be sore for a few days afterwards
- There is a small chance (less than 1%) of another dural puncture
- Infection, nerve damage or bleeding into your back are other rare complications

Contact the hospital urgently if you develop:

- Severe back pain
- A high temperature
- Worsening headache with neck stiffness
- Leg weakness
- Incontinence of urine or stool

For further information about post dural puncture headaches discuss with a health professional.

You can find more information about pain relief and anaesthetics in pregnancy on the Labour Pains website - www.labourpains.com