

SAULT AREA HOSPITAL

PATIENT INFORMATION

Epidural Anaesthesia for Obstetrics

Your doctors, your nurse and you together make the decision whether an **epidural** is the best way to give you pain relief or anaesthesia during your delivery. Feel free to ask the Doctor, Prenatal Nurse or Labour Nurse any questions you might have.

What is Epidural Anaesthesia?

It is a type of anaesthetic given during labour or C-section to relieve pain.

When is it given?

It is started when you are in active labour with regular contractions.

Where is it given?

In order for you to have the medication the Anaesthetist (doctor) needs to insert a needle into the epidural space. It is located in your back.

Your spinal cord and the nerves that connect to it are bathed in a fluid called *cerebrospinal fluid*. The covering that keeps this fluid in place is called the dura. Between the dura and the tough ligaments that connect the bones in your back is the epidural space.

How am I prepared for the anaesthetic?

Before it begins you will:

- have an intravenous (IV) started;
- receive a large amount of fluid in the intravenous;
- have your blood pressure and pulse taken;
- have your baby's heartbeat taken

How is it given?

- The doctor and nurse will ask you to get into a curled position either sitting or on your side.
- Your back will be washed with a special solution. *It may be cool.*
- The doctor will freeze a small patch of skin in the lower part of your back. You will be asked to lie very still while the doctor puts a special needle into the epidural space. When the needle is in the right place a soft plastic tube (catheter) is inserted and the needle part is removed.
- The tube is then taped in place and medication is given to relieve the pain.

How will I feel?

- You may have pressure in your back when the needle is being inserted.
- After the medication is put in, the lower half of your body and legs will feel warm and heavy.
- You can move your legs when an epidural is given for labour.
- 1-2 hours after delivery, the effects of the epidural wear off.

SAH - PATIENT INFORMATION CONTINUED

Important things to tell the nurse...

- if you are **DIZZY** or **FEELING SICK**
- if you have **PAIN**
- if you are **COLD**
- if you have a **HEADACHE**
- anything else you have questions about

What problems could happen during the anaesthetic?

- Epidural or spinal anaesthesia does have risks to it. Some can be very serious and even life-threatening. All precautions are taken to prevent problems.
- The doctor could have trouble getting the needle in the right place or the epidural may not work well, in which case it may need to be put in again.
- There is a small chance you could get a bad headache or have mild back pain the first few days after the anaesthetic.
- Your blood pressure may drop after the epidural making you feel light headed or sick to your stomach.
- With any procedure that is done on your back and near the spinal cord, there is a small chance of paralysis or numbness that may stay for a short time or possibly forever.