

Going home after a spinal or epidural anaesthetic

Information for patients



As part of your treatment you have received an anaesthetic involving numbing the lower half of your body by giving you an injection in your back.

Complications following these procedures are **rare** but it is important to recognise them, as prompt treatment can sometimes reduce the severity.

Headache

Many people experience mild headaches, but some may have a severe headache between one day and one week after a spinal or epidural. This is usually at the front or back of your head and it is worse when standing and improves if you lie down. Neck pain, a dislike of bright lights and feeling sick are also sometimes symptoms.

Lying flat and taking simple pain relief such as paracetamol and ibuprofen may help; you may need to take these regularly. Avoid lifting or straining and drink plenty of water. If the headache does not improve in 24 hours or is very severe, please seek medical attention. Some people need to have another procedure in the hospital to improve the headache.

Infection

Very rarely an infection develops at the site of the epidural or spinal. This could be at the surface of the skin or deeper inside. This can develop into an abscess which presses on the nerves and may damage them. This abscess needs urgent treatment with antibiotics and you may need to have further surgery.

Bleeding

If there is bleeding in the spine, an epidural/spinal haematoma can develop causing pressure on nerves which rapidly leads to back pain, altered sensation, and weakness. This is very rare but must be treated immediately to reduce the chance of permanent paralysis.

Nerve damage

If a nerve is injured a numb or tingly patch can occur. Rarely, this can be due to damage to a nerve when your spinal or epidural is put in but there are many other causes which are more common. Most of these problems will resolve within 6 months but some can be permanent.

What to look out for when you go home:

- New back pain, which is moderate to severe and usually focused around where the needle went in
- A red area or pus at the place the needle went in to your back
- A high temperature
- Stiff neck
- Weakness of your legs or changes in the feeling in your legs
- Difficulty passing urine or loss of control of your bladder or bowels.

If you have these symptoms you must seek medical help immediately

Please attend the Emergency Department and inform them you have recently had a spinal/epidural anaesthetic.

Call St John's Hospital on 01506 523 000 and ask to speak to the anaesthetist on call.

