

### What is an epidural?

An epidural is a type of anesthetic that is placed in the lower back via a small catheter. Once there, doctors can deliver pain medicine or local anesthetics to help relieve labor pain. It does not cause drowsiness for the patient or baby.

### How long does it take to place an epidural?

It typically takes about 10 minutes to place the epidural, but may take longer in some patients. Once in place, medicine will flow through the catheter to maintain pain relief through delivery. You should feel relief about 10-15 minutes after placement is complete.

### Will it hurt?

There is usually minor discomfort as the anesthesiologist inserts the needle/catheter. It should feel like a small pinch, followed by slight pressure until the catheter is taped in place. The needle is then removed and only the catheter remains, as it delivers the pain medication.

### How is an epidural placed?

A CRNA will help you get into the proper position and you will have to stay still at certain points during the procedure. They will numb your skin where they will insert the needle, and then insert the needle and catheter together near your spinal bones. The catheter is left behind in what is known as the epidural space and taped in place. It will continue to deliver the pain medication during the labor process.

### Can I walk with my epidural?

You will not be permitted to get up and walk around due to it being a patient safety issue.

### What is CSE?

CSE stands for **Combined Spinal-Epidural**. While it is similar to an epidural and uses the same types of medication, it provides much quicker pain control.



#### Childbirth Center

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[nwths.com/baby](http://nwths.com/baby)

\*Source: American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology

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# EPIDURALS For Labor Pain Relief

What You Need to Know



Childbirth Center

**Anesthetic  
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### Does all the pain go away?

Epidurals can help make contractions more manageable and not as strong, although you may feel some pressure as labor progresses. The amount and type of medication is adjusted through the labor process, as you do not want to be totally numb during labor. You will need to be able to feel the contractions slightly so you know when to push. A certified registered nurse anesthetist (CRNA) is available 24/7 and can work with the delivery team to make you as comfortable as possible.

### Does epidural anesthesia always work?

For a majority of patients, epidurals provide great relief. However, sometimes there are issues getting the needle into the proper position. The CRNA can usually resolve the issue without having to re-insert the needle.

### Are there patients who cannot have an epidural catheter?

Yes. If you have blood-clotting issues, heavy bleeding or neurologic disorders, epidurals are not recommended. Also, if you have had specific types of lower back surgery, you would not be a candidate to have an epidural.

### Does an epidural affect the progress of labor?

In the first stage of labor, before the cervix reaches 10 cm, it depends on the person. For some, it may slow labor down or speed it up, and for others it may not impact them. In the second stage, from pushing through delivery, it can make the process longer. This is especially true if you are numb and cannot push effectively. That is why pain relief focuses on you being comfortable, yet still able to feel contractions to push with them.

### Does using an epidural for pain relief in labor increase my chances for a Cesarean Section?

According to recent studies, there is no increase in the rate of Cesarean Sections as a result of slowed labor.\* However, some obstetricians believe that epidurals can slow the process down, which may lead to a Cesarean Section. In addition, some obstetricians think that uterine contractions and fetal positions are negatively impacted by epidurals. Studies show that the dilute solutions we use do not negatively impact labor. We encourage you to discuss your pain-relief options with your obstetrician.

### What are the possible side effects?

#### Common side effects include:

- Heaviness and numbness in the legs. This is normal and fades after delivery.
- Low blood pressure. This can occur and is quickly treated.
- You may experience some tenderness for a few days at the epidural insertion site.
- You may notice a moderate to severe headache can occur after delivery. This happens in less than 0.7% of patients. It is not life-threatening, and special treatments are available.
- You may experience itching, mild drowsiness, or difficulty with urination. These are typically resolved without treatment.
- You may experience brief fluctuations in your temperature; these are not of concern.

#### Rare side effects:

- Some women may have minor issues after delivery, such as an area of numbness in one leg. These are rare occurrences and often resolve completely. The delivery process and pushing can sometimes put pressure on certain nerves, which can result in numbness or tingling after delivery.
- Permanent health issues, though rare, can happen with any type of anesthesia. Close to 90% of patients choose epidurals for their delivery. We focus on the safety of the medications, equipment and precise placement of the epidural.

### Are there some people that epidurals may be recommended for?

The main purpose of an epidural is control pain throughout the labor process. But having an epidural can also be helpful in the event an emergency Cesarean Section is needed. We are able to pivot and use the epidural as a surgical nerve block, which can help speed delivery and prevent the need for general anesthesia.

If you have a pre-existing health concern, such as airway or heart problems, spinal cord/vertebrae problems, being overweight or other conditions, an epidural early on can help prevent certain issues that may occur. By keeping you comfortable, the workload on the heart can be reduced and high blood pressure can be managed. We recommend reaching out to your obstetrician and anesthesiologist to discuss how an epidural can benefit you. It is entirely your choice as a patient to receive an epidural.

### Do I have to have an epidural?

Absolutely not. If your pain level during labor is tolerable, you may choose to refrain from pain medication altogether – it is entirely your choice. However, if you change your mind, there are several options to choose from, and a CRNA is available 24/7 to help with pain relief.

### Here for you!

Our goal is for you to have a safe and fulfilling childbirth experience. If you are in the midst of a complicated pregnancy, we encourage you to discuss your concerns with our team as you approach your delivery date.

**The skilled and experienced Nurse Anesthetists of Anesthetic Solutions are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at Northwest Texas Healthcare System**

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**For estimates or billing questions, call 469-420-5840.**

