

Epidural Infusion Analgesia for Children

Patient information—Acute Pain Management Service

What is an epidural?

Epidurals have traditionally been associated more with labour and childbirth. In more recent times, epidurals have been used to combat post-operative pain following certain types of surgical procedures.

An epidural is a method of pain relief where local anaesthetic is given continuously through a fine plastic tube which has been placed in your child's back.

The tip of the tube lies near the nerves that transmit pain sensations at the place where the nerves enter the backbone.

Your child's Anaesthetist will describe the insertion process/potential ramifications when obtaining your consent for this procedure.

What are the benefits?

Potentially, your child will experience superior pain relief, fewer side effects, less drowsiness and be more clear-headed after surgery.

Epidural infusion pain relief may also hasten recovery after surgery. Children enjoy greater comfort, get well faster and have fewer complications related to surgery.

What are the potential side effects?

Some children experience a generalised itching. This is usually caused by one of the opioid drugs used in the epidural infusion solution. It is important to tell the nursing staff if you notice your child is distressed by itching so that treatment can be commenced.

Nausea may be another side effect although this is rare. Should nausea occur, it can usually be treated by removing the opioid component from the epidural infusion solution without compromising pain relief.

Diminished bladder sensation caused by the local anaesthetic solution may necessitate a urinary catheter. This is removed following cessation of the epidural infusion.



Numb, heavy, weak legs may occur as a result of the local anaesthetic action. This is usually resolved by altering the strength of the epidural infusion solution.

How long will the epidural stay in?

This depends upon the type and site of the surgery. Most children require the epidural infusion for about 48 hours following surgery.

How will my child be monitored?

Your child's nurse will monitor your child closely to ensure that they get good pain relief and that side effects are kept to a minimum.

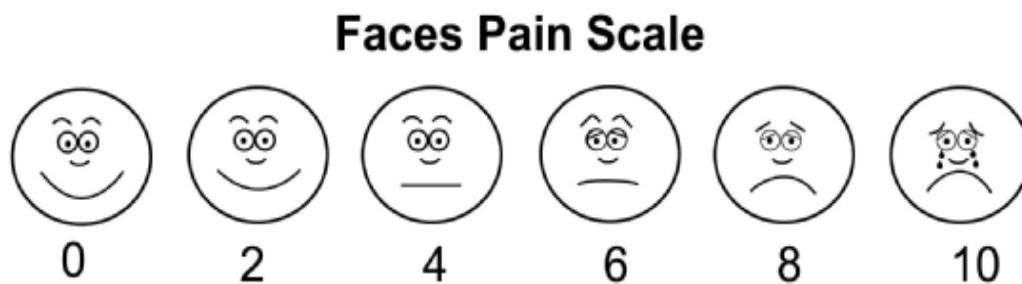
This is done, depending on your child's age, by showing them a series of faces depicting various stages of distress and asking them to point to the face which most closely depicts how they are feeling at the present time.

For the very young child, non-verbal expressions of pain are observed, eg. irritation, crying or restlessness. Your role as a parent is important in the assessment of your child's pain as you know your child better than anyone else. Most parents can very quickly discern when their child is in pain.

The Acute Pain Management Service will visit your child at least once a day for the duration of the epidural infusion and together with your nurse, ensure your child is as comfortable as possible.

How is the epidural removed?

After discussion with the Acute Pain Management Service team and provided that your child is comfortable, the epidural infusion will be stopped. The plastic tube will be removed approximately four hours later by your child's nurse. This is a quick and painless procedure.



From *Nursing Care of Infants and Children*, 3rd Ed. by L F Whaley & D L Wong, 1987 St Louis: Mosby. Copyright 1987 Mosby. Reprinted with permission.

Child Health 2005

For more information about:

- your health and medication, go to www.healthinfo.org.nz
- hospital and specialist services, go to www.cdhb.health.nz