

WHAT IS A LABOR EPIDURAL?

A labor epidural is a thin plastic tube (called a catheter) that is placed in your lower back. Medications delivered through the epidural catheter decrease pain signals from the uterus, cervix, and vagina. An epidural is the most effective form of pain relief for labor. Over 60% of patients in the United States receive an epidural for childbirth.

Is the epidural safe for my baby?

Epidurals are dosed with low concentrations of numbing and pain medications. Medications administered through an epidural have lower concentrations in your baby than do drugs given through an IV or inhalation. Epidural medications are safe for your baby.

How long does it take to get pain relief?

Once the epidural is placed, it can take 5 to 20 minutes to get pain relief. You will receive a button to adjust your level of pain relief during labor and delivery.

How long does the pain relief last?

The epidural will be attached to a pump that continuously delivers pain medication. Once your baby is delivered, the pump will be turned off and the epidural catheter will be removed.



The decision to get an epidural is yours. You are free to change your mind at any point during labor.

It is important to speak with your healthcare providers about options for pain relief and have your specific questions answered.

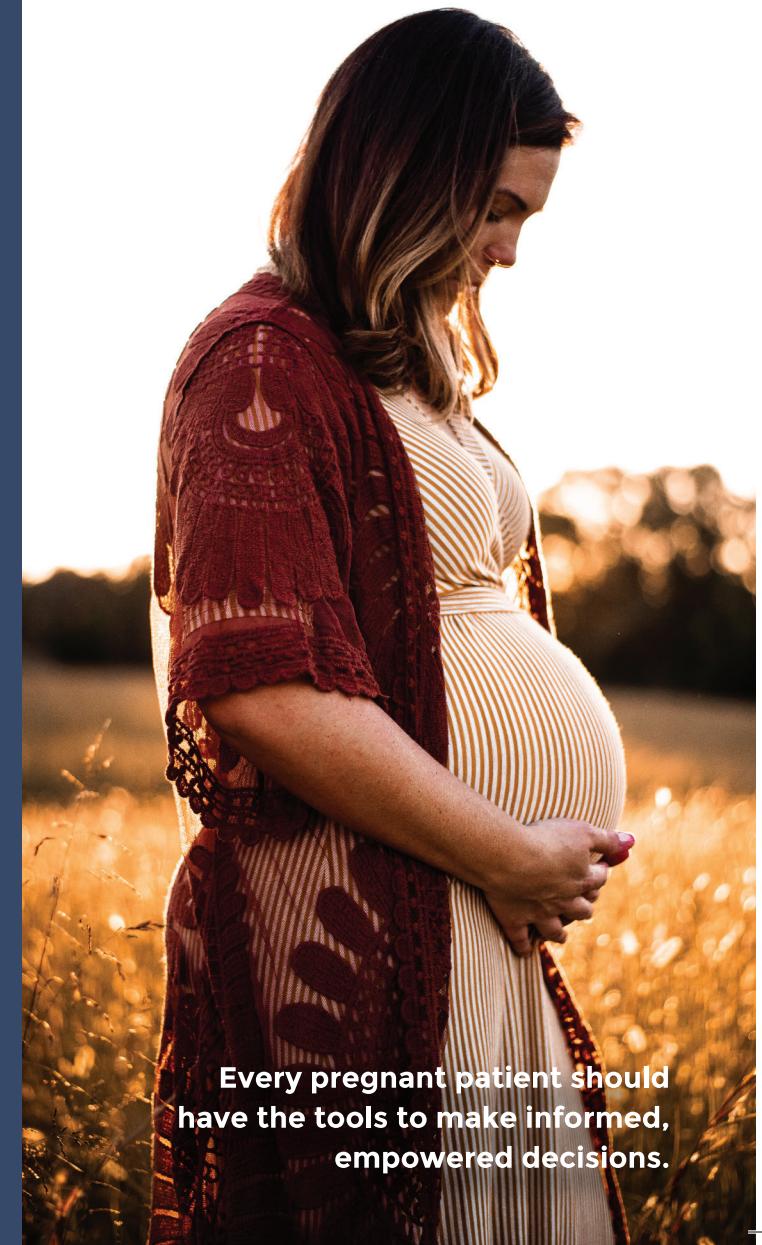


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Labor Epidural

Your Questions Answered



Every pregnant patient should have the tools to make informed, empowered decisions.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

An epidural provides the most effective form of pain relief for labor.

An epidural helps relieve the discomfort associated with childbirth. It facilitates a positive delivery experience for patients desiring control over their pain level.

An epidural helps lower stress hormone levels in labor.

The pain associated with labor can increase stress hormone levels. Effective epidural pain relief will decrease stress hormone levels, which can help lower blood pressure and heart rate.

An epidural allows easier and safer anesthesia for a cesarean delivery.

If your obstetrician decides that a cesarean delivery is necessary, stronger numbing medication can be given quickly through your epidural catheter. Medications given through the epidural can keep you awake and comfortable for a cesarean delivery, thus avoiding general anesthesia (going fully to sleep with a breathing tube) for an urgent cesarean delivery.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Will an Epidural ...

...increase my risk of a cesarean delivery?

Getting an epidural will not make you more likely to need a cesarean delivery. It can slightly increase the chance of your obstetrician needing to deliver the baby with special tools like a vacuum or forceps.

...slow down my labor?

Getting an epidural could possibly extend the pushing stage of your labor by ~ 45 minutes.

...limit my ability to walk around?

You must stay in bed after getting an epidural. It is not safe to walk afterward because of possible weakness in the legs and a higher risk of falling.

...make me sleepy?

The epidural medications do not cause drowsiness, but some patients feel sleepy after the epidural has been placed because their pain has been relieved.

...affect my ability to breastfeed?

Getting an epidural will not prevent you from breastfeeding your baby.

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS?

Blood pressure decrease

Your blood pressure is checked every few minutes after epidural placement. If necessary, you may receive medications to increase your blood pressure.

Itching

Epidural medications may cause itching. Usually, the itching goes away within 45 minutes. You may receive IV medication to help relieve the itching, if indicated.

Temporary back soreness

Back soreness may occur. If you develop back pain, it usually resolves in 2 to 3 days.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

COMMON 1 in 10	Incomplete or failed pain relief, requiring epidural replacement
LESS COMMON 1 in 100	Severe headache, sometimes requiring an additional epidural procedure to treat
RARE 1 in 1,000	Unintentional injection of medication into the spinal fluid or bloodstream, causing complications
VERY RARE 1 in 50,000	Significant nerve damage caused by bleeding, infection, or trauma