



**Wrightington, Wigan and  
Leigh Teaching Hospitals**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Labour Epidural

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## Patient Information

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## Introduction

This is a summary. Please discuss anything that is not clear with your anaesthetist. There is more information available at <https://www.labourpains.org/>

## Setting up your epidural

- You will need to have an intravenous cannula and maybe a drip.
- While the epidural is being put in, it is important that you keep still and let the anaesthetist know if you are having a contraction.
- The ideal position during the placement of the epidural is shown overleaf.
- The epidural takes 20 minutes to set up and 20 minutes to work.
- Some epidurals do not work fully and need to be adjusted or replaced.

## Advantages of epidural

- An epidural usually provides excellent pain relief.
- The dose or type of local anaesthetic can sometimes be altered, to allow you to move around the bed. This is low-dose or mobile epidural.
- In general, epidurals do not affect your baby.
- Epidurals can be topped up for caesarean section if required.

- Sometimes a spinal anaesthetic can be given for quicker effect.

## Possible problems with your epidural

- Repeated top-ups with stronger local anaesthetic may cause temporary leg weakness and might increase the risk of forceps or ventouse delivery.
- The epidural may slow down the second stage of labour slightly.
- You may develop low blood pressure, itching or a mild fever.
- The epidural site may be tender for a few days. Backache is NOT caused by epidurals but is common after any pregnancy.

## Ideal position during epidural



Risks of having an epidural to reduce labour pain

These details have been taken from <https://www.labourpains.org/> website. The figures shown on this page are estimates and may be different in different hospitals.

Possible problems	How common the problem is
Significant drop in Blood Pressure	Occasional- about 1 in 50
Not working well enough to reduce labour pain, so you need to use other ways of lessening the pain	Common- about 1 in 8
Not working well enough for a caesarean section, so you need to have a general anaesthetic	Sometimes- about 1 in 20
Severe headache	Uncommon- about 1 in 100
Nerve damage (for example- numb patch on a leg or foot, weakness of a leg)	Effect lasting less than 6 months: Rare- about 1 in 1,000  Effect lasting more than 6 months: Rare- about 1 in 13,000
Epidural abscess (infection)	Very rare- about 1 in 50,000
Meningitis	Very rare- about 1 in 100,000
Epidural hematoma (blood clot)	Very rare- about 1 in 170,000
Accidental unconsciousness	Very rare- about 1 in 100,000



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