

# EPIDURAL INFORMATION CARD

This card is for information purposes only.

Please ask a member of the Anesthesia Team or your Nurse if you have any questions.

## ***What is an Epidural?***

- Epidural medication temporarily numbs the nerves carrying pain signals during labor and delivery; you should still be able to move your legs and push but the goal is to minimize pain
- An Anesthesiologist will insert a special needle into your lower back that will be used to thread a small plastic tube in your *Epidural Space* (the area that contains nerves just *outside* the spinal cord). The needle is removed once the tube is in the right spot while the tube stays in
- Pain medications are given through this tube
- Not every women can have an epidural

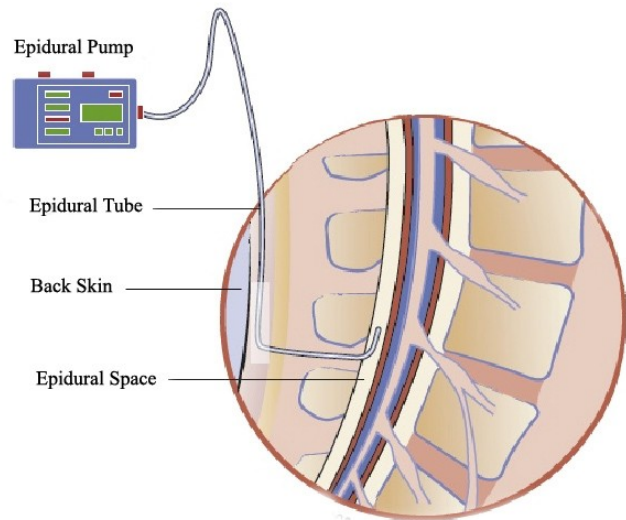
– some medical conditions make epidural insertion impossible or risky

## ***What is needed for an Epidural?***

- An IV to give you fluid
- A detailed history and physical examination by an Anesthesia Team member
- Consent for the procedure
- The ability to sit in the proper position during the procedure
- Time: it usually takes 15 – 20 minutes to place the epidural, then an additional 15 – 20 minutes for the medications to take full effect

## ***What are the Advantages of an Epidural?***

- The best form of continuous pain relief during labor
- Proven safe for you and your baby
- If an epidural is already in place, stronger medications can be put through it if you need a caesarean section



# **RISKS OF EPIDURAL ANALGESIA**

No anesthetic or analgesic is risk free. Most patients however do not suffer any serious complications. It is important to review the information below and please ask a member of the Anesthesia Team if you have any questions.

## ***Common Side Effects***

- Pain and bruising where the epidural was inserted
- Temporary difficulty in passing urine – in some cases requiring a urinary catheter
- Temporary leg weakness
- Insufficient pain control that may need extra medication through the epidural, removing and re-trying the epidural in a different location, or extra intravenous medications (1 in 7 patients)

## ***Uncommon Side Effects***

- Significant drop in blood pressure (1 in 50 patients)
- Severe Headache (1 in 100 patients)

## ***Rare Side Effects***

- Temporary nerve damage (such as leg weakness or a numb patch on your leg/foot) (1 in 1000 patients)
- A higher than expected spread of medication which can affect breathing muscles (1 in 13,000 patients)

## ***Very Rare Side Effects***

- Epidural abscess (1 in 50,000 patients)
- Meningitis (1 in 100,000 patients)
- Accidental unconsciousness (1 in 100,000 patients)
- Blood clot with spinal cord damage (1 in 170,000 patients)
- Permanent nerve damage with possible paralysis (1 in 250,000 patients)

Comparison: Risk of death from a motor vehicle collision (1 in 10,000 people) -