

Caudals for Back Pain

What is a caudal injection?

A caudal injection—or sacral epidural block—is the injection of local anaesthetic and/or steroid into the epidural space through the caudal canal at the tailbone area of the spine. The epidural space surrounds the membrane around the spinal cord, and contains nerve roots which pass through this space. Inflammation of these nerve roots cause pain. Injection of local anaesthetic and steroids can reduce inflammation and pain associated with these nerve roots.

How is a caudal block performed?

Caudal injections are performed in theatre under strict sterile conditions by your Anaesthetist. An intravenous cannula is placed in your hand through which medication is administered to help you feel relaxed and perhaps sleepy.

Monitoring equipment and an oxygen mask is placed on so that your Anaesthetist can watch your breathing and heart rate during the procedure.

While lying on your side—usually, your Anaesthetist will cleanse your lower back with antiseptic lotion and cover your back with a sterile drape. The caudal needle is inserted into the caudal space and medication is slowly injected. The needle is then removed and you are taken to recovery room for 20–30 minutes for further monitoring. Once you wake up properly you will be able to sit out of bed and have some refreshments. Most people go home the day of their caudal injection.

When should I expect to feel improvements?

The effects of a caudal injection can be immediate or take up to three weeks to notice. Some people find an increase in back symptoms for 2–3 days due to irritation of nerve roots. If this occurs, use any symptom relieving treatments you have found useful in the past.

How long will the improvements last?

About one third of patients will receive good relief for some weeks up to 3 months after the caudal injection, and one third obtain longer relief. The remainder of patients do not obtain any relief from the caudal injection.

What are the risks of a caudal injection?

All medical procedures carry risks. In the case of caudal injections these risks are small and usually able to be treated.

Less serious/temporary effects you may experience include:

- ~ Numbness and/or weakness in legs
- ~ Tenderness in tailbone where needle was inserted
- ~ Decrease in blood pressure which can be treated with fluids and/or medication through the intravenous cannula
- ~ Difficulty urinating. If your bladder becomes uncomfortably full, you may need medical assistance. This should only be a problem for an hour or two.

Rare side effects you may experience include:

- ~ Headache due to accidental puncture of the innermost membrane of the spinal canal, causing leakage of spinal fluid. The headache may last from hours to days and can be treated if necessary
- ~ Infection of the injection site

Some side effects are extremely rare and include:

- ~ Allergy to the drug injected
- ~ Irritation or damage to nerves or spinal cord causing numbness or weakness
- ~ Infection of the epidural space causing abscess or meningitis

Any Concerns?

If you have any queries regarding your caudal injection, please call the Anaesthetic Group, Ballarat on 03 5331 4888

If you experience new severe weakness in your legs, loss of bladder or bowel control, or a fever, you should contact your doctor or hospital emergency department as soon as possible.