

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

SOAP
Society for Obstetric
Anesthesia and Perinatology

A Product of
the SOAP Patient
Education
Subcommittee

I had an epidural that didn't work. (Why? What happened? Will it happen again?)

November 2021

A small proportion of epidurals don't work perfectly to take care of labor pain. This can happen for several reasons. It is important to tell your anesthesia provider if you had a bad experience in the past.

The epidural procedure involves placing a tiny, soft plastic tube (the epidural catheter) into the epidural space in your back.

If you are having pain and the epidural catheter is in the right place, sometimes all that is needed is to give you an extra dose of pain medication, or to give you medication that is slightly stronger or even to give you a different type of pain medication. It is normal for the pain of labor to get stronger as labor goes on and it is normal to need to get an extra dose of pain medicine at some point. If you are very close to delivering your baby it can sometimes be hard to control the pain at that point.

If it seems like the medication is spreading more on one side of your body, sometimes all that is needed is to slightly change the position of the catheter, like pulling it out by less than a half of an inch.

It is always important to tell your providers if you are having pain. If nothing they try to do helps, it is possible to place a new epidural catheter. Sometimes the tip of the catheter is not in the right location in your back, or the catheter has completely slipped out of the right space in your back. Those are other reasons to place a new catheter.

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