

# HEADACHES AFTER CHILD BIRTH FROM EPIDURAL OR SPINAL

## YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Headaches after childbirth are common. Sometimes, the headaches can happen because of the anesthetic (epidural or spinal) you received. The technical term for this headache is a “post-dural puncture headache,” or PDPH. That is the kind of headache we will discuss here.

### WHAT DOES A HEADACHE AFTER EPIDURAL OR SPINAL FEEL LIKE?



- Usually dull and throbbing, and the pain can be from mild to severe.
- Usually in the front and/or back of the head or neck.

### CONTACT YOUR DOCTOR IMMEDIATELY IF YOU HAVE A HEADACHE AND:



Fever



Drowsiness



Confusion



Vomiting

This could be signs of a serious condition that needs to be taken care of right away!

### WHEN DOES IT HAPPEN?

- If it is because of the anesthetic, it usually starts the day after you had your epidural or spinal, or at most within 5 days.
- It is very important to tell your healthcare team if you have a headache because there are ways to treat them.

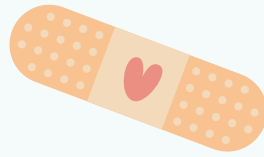


### WHY DOES IT HAPPEN?

- During a spinal or epidural, the needle may puncture the fluid-filled sac around the spinal cord, causing a leak of that fluid.
- The fluid leakage lowers pressure around the brain, leading to headaches.



## WHAT CAN I DO AT HOME?



The headache will usually get better on its own within the first 1 to 2 weeks, although it can take longer.

Some things you can do at home include:



Lying down flat for short periods of time



Taking over-the-counter pain medication as prescribed, such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen



Drinking plenty of fluids can help ease discomfort.

Caffeinated beverages like coffee, tea, and soft drinks may offer temporary relief.



Avoid lifting heavy objects and straining

## WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I STILL HAVE A HEADACHE OR IT GETS WORSE?

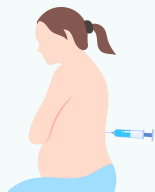


Make sure to tell your healthcare team.

If the at-home steps do not relieve the pain, your doctor may recommend a procedure called an epidural blood patch.

## WHAT IS AN EPIDURAL BLOOD PATCH?

This procedure is very similar to the one you had for your epidural or spinal anesthetic. In 8 out of 10 women, the headache is relieved or significantly improved by the blood patch.



- Once the epidural space is found in your back, the doctor will draw blood from a vein (usually your arm or hand) and inject the blood slowly into your back.
- Usually the headache goes away very quickly, but it may take a few hours.
- You will be asked to lie flat for about an hour or so.
- You should be allowed to go home after that if you are ready for discharge from the hospital or if you came to the hospital from home for the procedure.
- A second epidural blood patch might be needed if the first one does not work or if the headache returns.

## ARE THERE ANY RISKS?



Nerve damage, infection or bleeding in the back, and a repeat accidental puncture are rare complications.



An epidural blood patch can cause local bruising or pressure, even pain, in the back for a few days.



An epidural blood patch should NOT cause long-term back pain, fever, difficulty passing urine or stool, severe pain, or loss of strength or sensation in your legs.



Make sure to get instructions from your doctor on who to call if your headache comes back or you have any concerning symptoms.

## ARE THERE ANY RISKS IF I DON'T GET AN EPIDURAL BLOOD PATCH WHEN IT HAS BEEN RECOMMENDED?

The decision to have an epidural blood patch is made by you and your doctor. They will be able to explain further if needed!