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What to Consider Before Getting a Spinal Injection

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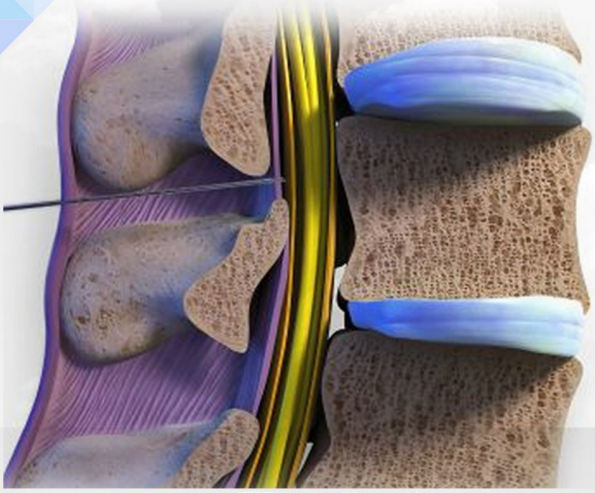

Patients will find that the benefits of an epidural steroid injection include a reduction in pain, primarily in leg pain (also called sciatica). Epidural steroid injections (ESIs) are a common treatment option for many forms of low back pain and leg pain. They have been used for low back problems since 1952 and are still an integral part of the non-surgical management of sciatica and low back pain. The goal of the injection is pain relief; at times the injection alone is sufficient to provide relief, but commonly an epidural steroid injection is used in combination with a comprehensive rehabilitation program to provide additional benefit.

There are a few key considerations to make prior to getting a spinal injection:

1. The effects of an epidural steroid injection tend to be temporary (lasting from a week to up to a year)

2. They can provide substantial pain relief but the success rates are approximately 50%

3. The most successful technique is when using a fluoroscopic guidance or radiographic confirmation through the use of contrast. So, ask your provider if they use this technology

4. The highest success rates of an epidural injection are coupled with a comprehensive

5. Consider the Risk Factors

a. **Infection can occur.** Severe infections are rare, occurring in 0.1% to 0.01% of injections

b. **Dural puncture ("wet tap").** A dural puncture occurs in 0.5% of injections. It may cause a post-dural puncture headache (also called a spinal headache) that usually improves within a few days. Although infrequent, a blood patch may be necessary to alleviate the headache. A blood patch is a simple, quick procedure that involves obtaining a small amount of blood from a patient from an arm vein and immediately injecting it into the epidural space to allow it to clot around the spinal sac and stop the leak.

c. **Bleeding.** Bleeding is a rare complication and is more common for patients with underlying bleeding disorders.

d. **Nerve damage.** While extremely rare, nerve damage can occur from direct trauma from the needle, or from infection or bleeding.

In summary, spinal injections can be an effective way to treat the symptoms of low back pain or sciatica. They do not treat the underlying cause of back pain. It is important to use injections to control pain while you explore the cause of back pain which is usually due to a movement dysfunction in areas above or below the spine (hips or upper spine).

To learn more about the causes of back pain visit

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