

Epidural Steroid Injection For Non-Surgical Treatment Of The Cervical Herniated Disc

One of the most invasive/noninvasive treatments, if that makes sense, for cervical herniated disc is an epidural steroid injection. It is sort of in between because it is not surgery, but it is an injection. I had a chance to talk to Lyle Posecion who took us through sort of a walk through of what is like to get an epidural steroid injection. We have a patient with a cervical herniated disc who has pain in the neck and let us assume it is, you know, the acute herniated disc, pain in the neck, radiating down the arm, numbness, tingling, and weakness.

Que 1: What is your approach to that patient when you first see that patient?

Ans 1: I just tell my patients it is not a cure, this is a steroid injection. The idea is that it helps with inflammation, so less inflammation, less irritation, and less pain hopefully. It is not going to change your anatomy, it is not going to put the disc back in place. Unfortunately, nothing can really do that. The body may heal over time, but once the disc is herniated, it is generally herniated. People ask how well will this work for me? You do not really know how much, how well it will work until you try it basically, but some people can get significant relief, I mean, you know, after one injection, you may have a few months' relief and then the structure may not help at all and basically if it does help and the pain does return, the reason that the pain returns is because that inflammation starts to build up again. First, I will see them in the office. After they have understood the risks, the benefits, and alternatives and decided they want to go ahead and do the procedure, basically, they come in here, we take their vital signs, we have them lay down on their stomach, we numb the skin with lidocaine, which is a numbing medication, then we use this x-ray machine to guide the needle to the proper place. Once there, we put in the contrast, which is a dye that I can see on the screen to make sure the medicine is going into the right place, and then we will put the medicine in. It is not a switch. It does not shut the pain off immediately. It usually takes a few days to a week or so for the surgery to take full effect that is why patients come back after two weeks to check and see how they are doing at that time. The procedure itself will take about 15 to 20 minutes or so, but the whole process of coming in, filling out the paper work, changing your clothes, be here about an hour or hour and an half and then after the procedure, we take the patient back to the room, they can change, they should have a driver with them, and then we have them wait in the waiting room another 10 minutes to make sure that they feel okay and then they go home the rest of the day and do not do anything too strenuous.

Que 2: Exactly where, can you point your finger where you put the injection?

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Ans 2: C7-T1 and usually pick that space because in the neck that is the biggest part of the epidural space, safest place to place the medication and although if you have a herniation that is higher up, the medications are liquid, so we will put in certain volumes, really blanketing the area, so we do not have to be at that specific level because the medicine will flow up and down.

Que 3: Does this injection hurt?

Ans 3: I mean I do all my procedures here without any conscious sedation. Generally, you know, the worst part of it is, you know, little pinch for the numbing medicine. Of course, you know, it is like when you go to dentist, you get the Novocain-like pinch and then you get a feeling of numbness and then, from then on, it is pretty well tolerated. I mean the worst part is usually just the anticipation, not knowing what to expect. So, we do our best to, you know, prepare our patients, talk to them during the procedure, make sure they understand what we are doing, what to expect and at any time, if anyone feels uncomfortable, we just stop and we would not proceed, no one is forcing anyone to do.

Que 4: Is the procedure safe?

Ans 4: Yeah, I would say in the grand scheme of things, I mean, nothing is without risk. Major complications again are, just like most of the procedure, infection, uncontrolled bleeding, and nerve injury, but those risks are relatively low, less than 1%.

So the bottom line on epidural steroid injection, wow, this one is as far as you can go without having surgery. As you saw from the video, there is a needle going in, there is anesthetic, there is x-ray, but it really does put the medicine right where you need it. If you do not want to have surgery and if you want to avoid surgery, it is an option you have to consider.

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