Epidural Catheter for Back Surgery  
(Microdiscectomy, ALIF)

This handout explains the types of anesthesia used for back surgery. It is important to partner with your surgeon and anesthesia doctor to choose the best pain relief for you.

The two types of anesthesia used for microdisc or ALIF back surgery are general and regional. Both are safe and good choices. Your options will be discussed with you on the day of surgery.

- **General:** You will be fully asleep and have a breathing tube. At the end of surgery, we will take the breathing tube out and wake you up.
- **Regional:** Epidural blocks are used. Medicine is put in your back that will stop the feeling in your legs for 2-3 hours. You will also get medicine to help you nap. Most people do not remember their surgery; but, depending on your level of sedation, there is a chance you could. **Note:** an epidural catheter is not the same as an epidural steroid shot.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Will I be awake?</th>
<th>General</th>
<th>Epidural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You will be fully asleep and have a breathing tube.</td>
<td>You will be given medicine to help you nap but will not be fully asleep.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>You will be fully asleep and will not remember anything</th>
<th>You will not be fully asleep and will not need a breathing tube. This can help reduce nausea, have better pain control and wake up faster after surgery.</th>
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<tr>
<th>Cons</th>
<th>You may feel nauseous and sleepy when you wake up</th>
<th>You will have to wait for the numbness to wear off.</th>
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| Risks                             | Nausea, Sleepy, Sore Throat, Dental Damage             | Nerve Damage, Bleeding, Infection, Headache                                                     |
What to Expect
Some things are the same whether you have general anesthesia or an epidural.

Pre-Operative Area
This is where you will start your day.
While in this area, you will:
1. Talk about your health and anesthesia plan with your anesthesia doctor.
2. Have an IV placed
3. Meet the OR nurses and the rest of your team.
4. Get medicine in your IV to help you relax.

The Operating Room
This is where the surgery takes place.
When in the OR, you will:
1. Be moved onto a bed and have monitors placed.
2. Confirm your name, birthday, surgery, and allergies with the team.

With General Anesthesia You Will:
3. Take deep breaths of oxygen and get IV medicine that will make you sleepy.
4. Have a breathing tube put in after you fall asleep.
5. Be positioned on your stomach. Your arm, neck, and legs will be well supported and cushioned.
6. Wake up when surgery is over and have the breathing tube pulled out. People often do not remember anything until the recovery room.
7. Have a nurse manage any issues that arise when you get to the recovery room.

Epidural
An epidural is a small catheter or tube placed just outside the spinal cord (called the epidural space). It helps medicine get close to the nerve roots and numb nerves that supply feeling to the area you are having surgery on and to help with pain. They work the same as the medicine dentists use to numb your mouth.

The Steps of Getting an Epidural
1. You will be taken to the OR and asked lay on your stomach.
2. You will get medicine in your IV to help you nap during surgery.
3. Your back is cleaned with germ-free soap.
4. A numbing medicine is placed in your skin where the needle will go.
5. The needle is gently pushed into your back and the small, plastic catheter is placed (this catheter is about the width of a guitar string). You should feel very little pain during this.
6. The needle is taken out and the plastic catheter is taped in place.
7. It is okay to lie on your back after this is placed.
8. With an epidural, you may not have to go to the recovery room and can go back to your pre-op room.