

# Regional anaesthetic for unplanned Caesarean Sections (CS) – information card



**Regional anaesthetic (an epidural or spinal anaesthetic) is a type of pain relief where you have an injection of local anaesthetic in your lower back to completely numb you from the chest down. Your legs will also become numb and you will not be able to move them. It usually takes between 10 and 20 minutes for the anaesthetic to take full effect.**

## Setting up the anaesthetic

- You will first have a drip attached through a needle called an intravenous cannula placed in your hand or arm.
- An anaesthetist will inject local anaesthetic into your lower back.
- You will have a tube called a catheter inserted to empty your bladder.
- Your blood pressure and oxygen levels will be checked frequently.

Some hospitals allow your birth partner to be with you during this procedure, but others will only let him or her come in afterwards.

## Advantages of a regional anaesthetic

This is often the safest option for you if you need an emergency Caesarean section. It allows you to be awake for the birth of your baby and the pain relief after regional anaesthetic is usually more effective than after a general anaesthetic.

## Possible problems with a regional anaesthetic

- The anaesthetist will check to make sure that you are numb before the operation is started. These checks are not 100% reliable and you may experience unpleasant feelings during the operation.
- It is common to feel pulling and pushing inside your tummy, and you should not be alarmed. Sometimes there may be mild pain which can be treated by giving you a painkiller in the drip or to breathe in through a mask or mouthpiece. Occasionally you may feel severe pain. If this happens, the anaesthetist will probably give you a general anaesthetic very quickly. This will put you to sleep.
- It is common for the anaesthetic to cause your blood pressure to drop. This may make you feel sick or faint. Your anaesthetist will give you medicine to treat this as soon as it happens. Sometimes the medicine is given before you have these symptoms.

## Risks and side effects of regional anaesthetic

Possible problem	How common the problem is
<b>Itching</b>	Common – about <b>1 in 3 to 10</b> people, depending on the drug and dose
<b>Significant drop in blood pressure</b>	Spinal: Common – about <b>1 in 5</b>  Epidural: Occasional – about <b>1 in 50</b>
<b>Epidural given during labour not effective enough to be topped up so another anaesthetic is needed for the Caesarean section</b>  <b>Anaesthetic not working well enough and more drugs are needed to help with pain during the operation</b>  <b>Regional anaesthetic not working well enough for Caesarean section and general anaesthetic is needed</b>	Common – about <b>1 in 8 to 10</b>  Spinal: Occasional – about <b>1 in 20</b> Epidural: Common – about <b>1 in 7</b>  Spinal: Occasional – about <b>1 in 50</b> Epidural: Occasional – about <b>1 in 20</b>
<b>Severe headache</b>	Epidural: Uncommon – about <b>1 in 100</b> Spinal: Uncommon – about <b>1 in 500</b>
<b>Nerve damage</b> (For example, numb patch on a leg or foot, weakness of a leg)	Effects lasting less than six months: Quite rare – about <b>1 in 1,000 to 2,000</b>  Effects lasting more than six months: Rare - about <b>1 in 24,000</b>
<b>Meningitis</b>	Very rare – about <b>1 in 100,000</b>
<b>Abscess (infection) in the spine at the site of the spinal or epidural</b>  <b>Haematoma (blood clot) in the spine at the site of the spinal or epidural</b>  <b>Abscess or haematoma causing severe injury, including paralysis (paraplegia)</b>	Very rare – about <b>1 in 50,000</b>  Very rare – about <b>1 in 168,000</b>  Very rare – about <b>1 in 100,000</b>
<b>With an epidural:</b>  <b>A large amount of local anaesthetic being accidentally injected into a vein in the spine</b>  <b>A large amount of local anaesthetic being accidentally injected into spinal fluid, which may cause difficulty in breathing and, very rarely, unconsciousness</b>	Very rare – about <b>1 in 100,000</b>  Quite rare - about <b>1 in 2,000</b>

Accurate figures are not available for all of these risks and side effects. Figures are estimates and may vary from hospital to hospital.

This card is a summary. There is more information on the website at [www.oaformothers.info](http://www.oaformothers.info)  
If you have any concerns, please discuss them with your anaesthetist.



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