

Intrathecal Pump - FAQ



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Intrathecal Pump – Frequently Asked Questions

What is an intrathecal pump?

An intrathecal pump is a specialized device that delivers concentrated amounts of medication into the spinal cord area via a small catheter (tubing). Medications taken orally get diffused throughout the entire body which means that a great deal of medication must be ingested in order to get appropriate quantities to the place it is needed most to ease pain. Now we have the ability to get that medicine exactly where it is needed. By surgically implanting a pump below the skin and running a catheter to the precise location in the spine where the pain is located, we can direct medication directly to that site, allowing for more potent pain relief.

Am I a candidate for Intrathecal Pump Implant?

This treatment is offered only after extensive efforts at less invasive treatments have failed. If this point is reached, and if an implant is considered, a psychological assessment can help to determine if you are ready for such technology. A trial treatment phase will be implemented during which a pump is tried on a short-term basis. If the desired benefit is achieved without significant side-effects, then the physician will proceed with a permanent implant.

What happens during the procedure?

The procedure is performed in two stages. The first stage is the trial phase where a single injection is made to assess effectiveness and screen for unwanted side effects. If this trial is successful in relieving symptoms, then at a later date the permanent device is placed. Remember you will have to meet certain other screening criteria. The procedure involves inserting a needle through the skin and deeper tissues, so there is some discomfort involved. However, the physician will numb the skin and deeper tissues with local anesthetic. Patients also receive other medications which makes the procedure easier to tolerate. The placement of the tubing is done under local anesthesia with patients mildly sedated. For the pump placement, patients are given stronger intravenous sedation and analgesia. You will be lying on your side. Your condition is continuously monitored by the physician and his staff. The skin is cleaned with antiseptic solution and then the procedure is completed. X-ray guidance is used while inserting the tubing. The tubing is inserted in the midline of the lower back. The pump is then placed on the side of the abdomen.

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What are some of the risks involved?

Generally speaking, this procedure is safe. However, with any procedure, there are risks, side effects, and possibility of complications. Please discuss your concerns with your physician.

What should I expect after the procedure?

You may feel that your pain is decreased. The pump is adjusted electronically to deliver adequate amounts of medication. The medication contained within the pump will last about 1-3 months depending upon the concentration and amount of medication infused. It is then refilled via a tiny needle inserted into the pump chamber through the skin. This will be done at the clinic and takes only a few minutes.

How Long Does the Pump Last?

The batteries in the pump may last 3-5 years depending on the usage. The batteries cannot be replaced or recharged. The pump itself will need to be replaced.

Note: This procedure cannot be performed if you have an active infection, flu, cold, fever, or very high blood pressure. Please make us aware of these conditions. We hope this information helps. Please feel free to contact Inland Pain Medicine for any additional concerns you might have.