



## Post-Dural Puncture Headache

### Patient Information Pamphlet

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### What is a post-dural puncture headache (PDPH)?

A PDPH is a headache that may result from having a spinal or epidural procedure. It is caused by a puncture (a hole or cut) in the dura. This is the membrane surrounding your spinal cord and the fluid it floats in. The same fluid is also around your brain.

A puncture in the dura can cause a slow leak of this fluid. When you sit or stand, gravity pulls on your brain because there isn't as much fluid for it to "float in". This can give you a headache.

PDPH happens to about 1% of patients and does not involve any damage to your brain or spinal cord. It often begins 24-48 hours after having a spinal or epidural. It can last a week or more. The leak will heal with time and the PDPH will get better.

### What symptoms should I expect?

- A mild to severe headache that gets worse if you sit or stand up and that gets better when you lie down
- The headache may be at the front or back of your head or both, and may spread down your neck.
- Nausea and vomiting
- Vision changes (seeing double, light sensitivity)

### What are my treatment options?

#### Treatment for the headache

For relief of your headache symptoms try:

- Lying down
- Drinking lots of fluids
- Drinking caffeinated beverages, like coffee, tea or cola
- Taking acetaminophen or ibuprofen
- Opioid analgesics such as morphine or hydromorphone are only used in extreme cases

**Please note:** none of these treatments make the puncture heal any faster, but they do make the headache feel less severe while the puncture heals.

#### Epidural blood patch

This option is for patients who have a severe headache. It is done almost the same way as a regular epidural procedure except a small amount of blood is drawn from your arm under sterile conditions. This blood is then injected into your back through the epidural needle. Your vital signs are closely watched while this is being done.

An epidural blood patch is done in the hospital by an Anesthesiologist. The same risks of having an epidural apply to this procedure. And if a second puncture is made, the headache may get worse

The headache will be gone for most people after one blood patch. Some people may need a second blood patch to get better.

Sadly, the blood patch will not take away the headache in a small number of people. These people may need more time to get better. The puncture will heal on its own and the body will make more of the lost fluid. Then the headache will go away.

## When should I call the hospital?

- If you had an epidural or spinal and have a headache that lasts longer than 7 days.
- If you are having difficulty coping (difficulty standing, eating, or looking after yourself or your baby) because of a severe headache.
- **Note:** There are many other reasons you may have a headache after having a baby: lack of sleep, milk coming in, not eating properly, tension etc. PDPH headaches are different. They are more constant and do not get better when you lie down.

Contact your Obstetrician first if you have a severe headache that does not get better when you lie down, and if you have a fever, are drowsy or have any other concerns. If necessary, your Obstetrician will ask you go to the obstetrical triage area at your hospital.

## Who should I call?

The Ottawa Hospital Obstetric Triage Desk:

- **Civic Campus** Tel: 613 761- 5112 (option 3)
- **General Campus** Tel: 613 737-8012

The triage nurse will contact the Anesthesiologist on duty in the Birthing Unit who will then contact you to discuss what is happening to you and how they can help.

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