

## Spinal Epidural Abscess

A spinal epidural abscess is an infection in the epidural space surrounding the spinal cord. It contains bacteria or other microbes and may cause neurological problems by localised pressure on the spinal cord or spinal cord vessels.

### CAUSES

A spinal epidural abscess may occur due to:

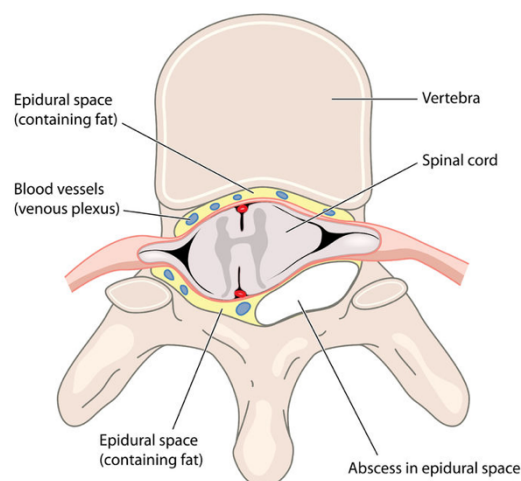
- Direct spread from adjacent infected regions is osteomyelitis, psoas abscess.
- Spread from distant infected regions through the bloodstream e.g. urinary tract, lung and bone infections.
- Direct implantation of bacteria into the epidural space around the spinal cord e.g. post-trauma, epidural.

### SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

People with epidural abscesses may be very sick.

They may show:

- **Systemic symptoms** – There will be normal signs of infection with swinging fevers, hot/cold flushes and drenching sweats.
- **Localised symptoms** – There will be severe back pain localised over the site of the abscess. Specific neurological signs may include gradual paraplegia and loss of control of bowels and bladder.



### INVESTIGATIONS

#### Blood Tests

These include a septic screen of at least 3 blood cultures, an FBE and inflammatory as a measure of the severity of the infection, electrolytes, and liver function tests to rule out multi-organ failure and a coagulation screen prior to any neurosurgical intervention.

#### Radiological Tests

- MRI Spine – This is the gold standard to diagnose an epidural abscess.
- Occasionally abdominal/pelvis CT and/or ultrasounds are needed to diagnose the source of the epidural abscess.