

Spring 2008

# LivingWELL

Northern Nevada  
MEDICAL CENTER  
YOUR SOURCE  
FOR HEALTH AND  
WELLNESS

## Contents

Home

Physicians reflect on 25 years at Northern Nevada Medical Center

How does an epidural help back or neck pain?

Good workstation positions help prevent back pain

Developing a strong core: Low back pain can be prevented

Spring 2008 Calendar of events

Health fairs take wellness programs to the community

Tanning beds: Are they ever safe?

Help manage stress with good nutrition

Letter from the CEO

Past Issues

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## How does an epidural help back or neck pain?

By Forrest Burke, MD

The patient who asked me this started having back pain after shoveling snow to clear his walkway and driveway. His back pain radiated down his right leg.

He was sent for an MRI, which showed that his pain was due to a disc herniation at the lowest disc level. Because of the disc herniation, I recommended an epidural to help the disc to heal. This is a procedure in which steroid medications are injected directly into the epidural space, the space surrounding the nerves within the spinal canal, to ease sciatica pain.

Sciatica pain is also known as disc pain or radiating leg pain. Acute sciatica is described as low back pain that extends below the knee for six weeks or less.

Often, it is caused by nerve irritation from discs in the lower back.

Once my patient was comfortable with an explanation of how the epidural would help him, he agreed to it. Using X-ray guidance, his epidural was completed at the location where the MRI indicated his disc problem was.

After everything was properly positioned, the procedure took about five minutes. The patient felt improvement the same day we did the epidural. He went to physical therapy to strengthen his back and improve body mechanics to prevent a return of symptoms.

He also bought a snow blower -- so he will be ready for the next winter storm to hit his neighborhood.

### Key features of epidurals

- X-ray helps precisely place the solution in the correct location.
- Anesthetic confirms the pain is from the epidural area.
- Placing the solution flushes inflammation out of the area.
- Steroids block inflammation from returning to the area.
- Blocking inflammation:
  - Gives your body a chance to heal.
  - Allows physical therapy and chiropractic care to be more effective.
  - Allows you to be more active.

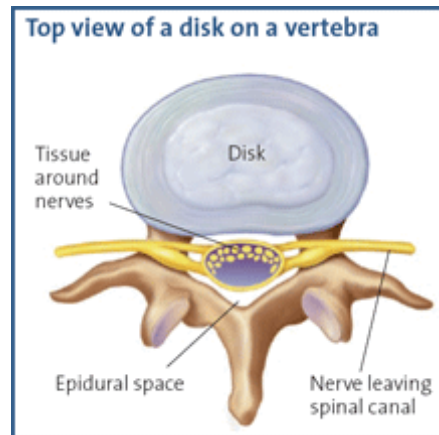


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Forrest Burke, MD, is a physiatrist, a doctor of physical medicine, with Silver State Spinecare, 1055 Roberta Lane, Suite 103, Sparks. For more information, please call **331-2600**.



Northern Nevada Medical Center  
2375 E. Prater Way, Sparks, NV 89434  
775-331-7000