

Nerve Root Block versus Transforaminal Epidural?

- Selective nerve root blocks (SNRB) differ in various ways compared to transforaminal epidural injections (TF ESI) as outlined below.
- It's vital to convey the appropriate procedure when ordering these.
 - Most importantly so the patient undergoes the optimal procedure
 - Also important: for billing purposes, since these are different CPT codes
- Many cases are inappropriately ordered as SNRBs when a TF ESI is actually desired based on the clinical indications.
 - MSK Radiology sometimes can discern the discrepancy between the order and the clinical indication and change the order.
 - Not always successful, and should not be our role
- Please be thoughtful when ordering these procedures. We need to reduce the number of inappropriately ordered SNRBs drastically.

Here are the differences:

Selective Nerve Root Block:

- Primarily a **diagnostic** procedure
 - Designed to determine if one particular nerve root is the cause of a patient's symptoms
 - Can be a guide to whether further surgical intervention (e.g. foraminotomy, etc.) may benefit
- Therapeutic benefit is nice, but not the main goal
 - Less medication administered than for TF ESIs
 - Intent is to avoid transforaminal and epidural flow, potentially leading to decreased long term efficacy
- Should NOT be ordered more than once for any nerve root unless the first procedure was unclear for diagnosis

Transforaminal ESI:

- Primarily a **therapeutic** procedure
- More medication than SNRB
- Should be the default for unilateral radicular symptoms unless using to make surgical decisions
- Should be the procedure of choice in nonsurgical patients

A couple qualifying comments:

- Occasionally an intended SNRB will end up with medication in the epidural space or a TF ESI will not
 - We try to include that information in the procedure report
- At L5-S1, the window is small and often affects which procedure is possible
- At S1, almost all procedures end up being TF ESIs—it is very uncommon to keep these injections selective