

Lumbar Puncture

Lumbar puncture, also called a spinal puncture or spinal tap, is a test where a small amount of fluid is removed from the space around the spinal cord. The fluid, called cerebrospinal fluid or CSF, is tested for problems.

An adult family member or friend needs to come with you to take you home after the test. It is not safe for you to drive or leave alone.

Arrive on time for your test. Plan on being here for about 2 hours. The test takes about 45 minutes.

To Prepare

- Talk to your doctor about the medicines you take, including prescription and over the counter medicines, vitamins, minerals or herbal supplements. If you are taking any medicines to thin your blood, you may need to stop or change your medicines before your test.
- You may need to have some blood tests done before this test. Talk to your doctor about when and where you should have the tests done.
- Have an adult drive you to your test and be there to take you home after the test. It is not safe for you to leave after the test by yourself.
- The day of your test, remove any jewelry, including any piercings. Bring a list of all your medicines and your allergies, your insurance card and a photo ID.

During the Test

- You will wear a hospital gown.
- The staff will help you into one of these positions:
 - Lie on your left side with your knees pulled up to your stomach as far as you can.
 - Sit on the side of the bed and lean over a table.
 - Lie on your stomach.
- The doctor cleans your lower back with a special soap. This may feel cold.
- Numbing medicine is put into the skin on your back. This may sting for a few seconds.
- When the skin is numb, a needle is placed between the bones of your spine to get the fluid. The needle does not go into your spinal cord.
- You may feel some pressure but no pain. Breathe slowly and deeply, relax and try not to move.
- While the needle is in place, you must stay very still.
- Fluid is removed through the needle in a slow drip. This may take 5 to 20 minutes based on how much fluid is needed.
- The needle is taken out and a band-aid is put on the site.

After the Test

- You will lie flat for 1 hour. Ask for help to get out of bed if you need to go to the bathroom during this time. Your blood pressure, heart rate and breathing rate will be checked.
- You will need to have an adult family member or friend take you home for your safety.
- On the ride home, you may be directed to lie flat on your back in the back seat of the car if you have a headache.
- At home, if you have a headache, lay down for at least an hour with your head flat or propped up on only 1 pillow.
- You can get up to go to the toilet.
- Drink plenty of liquids, especially water and caffeine drinks to avoid or ease a headache.
- Take acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin) as directed on the label to help ease your headache if needed.
- Avoid exercise and strenuous activity for the next 24 hours.
- Remove the band-aid from the site the day after your test.
- Test results are sent to your doctor. Your doctor will share the results with you.

Call your doctor right away if you have:

- A severe headache
- Nausea or vomiting
- A fever
- Numbness or tingling in your legs
- More back pain

Call 911 right away if you have excessive bleeding or drainage at the site.

Talk with your doctor or nurse if you have any questions or concerns.