Lumbar Puncture

What is a lumbar puncture?

A lumbar puncture, also called a spinal tap, is done to measure the amount of pressure in the spinal canal, inject medication into the spinal column or to remove a small amount of cerebral spinal fluid (CSF) for testing. CSF is the fluid that delivers nutrients to and cushions the brain and spinal cord.

A lumbar puncture is often performed to help diagnose various disorders including bacterial, fungal and viral infections, bleeding around the brain, various cancers, and inflammatory conditions of the nervous system including Guillain-Barre syndrome and multiple sclerosis.

Before Your Exam

- You will likely be instructed not to eat or drink anything after midnight before your procedure.
- You may be instructed to stop taking medicines before the test.
- If the procedure is done on an outpatient basis, you may be asked to stay in the hospital for several hours after the procedure. Plan to have another person drive you home.
- Tell the health care provider if you:
  - Are pregnant or think you may be
  - Have any bleeding problems
  - Have any allergies
  - Take any prescribed or over-the-counter medicines or herbal supplements
  - Have a history of seizures or take any prescribed seizure medicines
  - Take blood thinners (anticoagulants), aspirin or other medicines that affect blood clotting. It may be necessary for you to stop these medicines before the procedure.

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ATENCIÓN: si habla español, tiene a su disposición servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística. Llame al número siguiente 407-303-3025.

ATANSYON: Si w pale Kreyòl Ayisyen, gen sèvis èd pou lang ki disponib gratis pou ou. Rele nimewo ki anba an 407-303-3025.

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What happens during a lumbar puncture?

You will change into a hospital gown.

During the lumbar puncture you may lie on the exam table on your side with your chin tucked to your chest and knees tucked to your abdomen. Or, you may sit on the edge of an exam table with your arms draped over a table positioned in front of you. In either position the back is arched, which helps to widen the spaces between your vertebrae.

Your lower back will be cleaned, covered with drapes and injected with a numbing medicine.

A hollow needle will be inserted through the numbed skin and into the space where the CSF is located. You will feel some pressure while the needle is inserted. You will be instructed to remain absolutely still during the insertion of the needle.

Depending on the reason for your procedure:

A small amount of CSF may be withdrawn through the needle to be tested in a laboratory.

CSF may be removed to relieve pressure in the spinal canal.

Chemotherapy or other medication may be injected into the spinal canal as prescribed by your physician.

When the procedure is done, the needle will be removed and a bandage will be placed over the injection site.

The procedure is usually completed within 45 minutes.

After the Exam

- Typically, you will be asked to lie flat for a few hours following the procedure. This helps reduce the incidence of a headache. You will be allowed to roll from side to side as long as your head is not elevated. If you need to urinate, a nurse will assist you during this time.
- You will be asked to drink extra fluids to rehydrate after the procedure. This replaces the CSF that was withdrawn during the spinal tap and reduces the chance of developing a headache.
- After recovery, you may be taken to a hospital room or discharged to your home. If you go home, you should only engage in very light activity the rest of the day.
- Generally, if no complications occur, you may return to your normal diet and activities 24 hours after the procedure.

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