

Lumbar Puncture

Commonly referred to as a spinal tap, this is a procedure that allows us to take a small sample of spinal fluid from your lower back. To do so, a thin spinal needle is inserted through a space between the bones of the lower back into a pool of spinal fluid well below the bottom of the spinal cord. There will be no danger of damaging the spinal cord.

When having this procedure you will be asked to lie on your side. The area will be cleaned with an antiseptic and a numbing medicine will be applied to reduce any discomfort. The area will be covered with a sterile drape. Your lower back will be examined by hand to find the space where the needle will be inserted. The needle is then pushed through the space. This space is small and sometimes a couple of attempts are needed to find it. It is very important that you lie as still as possible during the procedure. The fluid comes out slowly, a drop at a time, and it can take several minutes for the desired amount of spinal fluid to be collected. Usually we collect about 1 or 2 tablespoons of fluid. The needle is then removed and an adhesive bandage is applied. It takes about one hour for your body to replace the fluid that was removed.

Generally there is not a lot of pain with a lumbar puncture. It is similar to getting a shot. To prevent any discomfort, we will numb the area.

There are nerves floating inside the pool of spinal fluid where the needle is inserted. Occasionally, patients may experience an electric jolt in the leg or hip. This is not dangerous or an indication of a problem.

Like any procedure that involves a needle, you are at risk of bleeding or infection. Prior to the procedure, we may ask you to have blood work checked to make sure your blood counts are good. **If you are taking a blood thinner, please make sure we are aware.** It will have to be held prior to the spinal tap. We will give you specific instructions on how to do so. Do not stop it without discussing it with us.

Sometime a spinal tap is performed to inject medicine into the spinal fluid (**intrathecal chemotherapy**). To do so, the chemotherapy is injected through the same needle used to collect spinal fluid. Generally patients do not notice a difference compared to when fluid is being collected. Sometimes they may feel sensation in their leg or hip as the medicine is being injected. This is not an indication of a problem.

When the spinal tap is completed and the needle removed, you may be asked to lie on your back for 30 minutes so that you may be monitored. You will then be sent home.

Headaches can occur after a spinal tap. If you get a headache, lay down flat. You can take over the counter medications such as acetaminophen. Stay hydrated with water and drink caffeine-containing drinks such as coffee. If you continue to be uncomfortable, please contact our office for further instructions.