



Patient & Family Guide

2023

Lumbar Puncture

Halifax Infirmary



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Lumbar Puncture

What is a lumbar puncture?

- This test is sometimes called a spinal tap.
- There is a space around your spinal cord that is filled with fluid. In a lumbar puncture, a small amount of fluid is taken from this space.
- The cells in the fluid are studied under a microscope in a lab to check for any problems.

How long does a lumbar puncture take?

It takes about 30 to 45 minutes.

How is the test done?

- We will help you to lie on your side at the edge of your bed or on an exam table. We will ask you to pull your knees up as close to your chest as possible, with your chin touching your chest. Your back will look like a letter C (see picture).



- The doctor will wipe your lower back with a special cleansing solution. It will feel cold.
- They will then use a needle to inject medication into your lower back. This will freeze your skin (similar to dental freezing) so that you do not feel any pain during the test. This will sting.
- The doctor will insert (put in) a lumbar puncture needle between the bones of your lower spinal column (spine). You may feel some pressure, but you will not feel any pain.
- The needle will be used to remove fluid from your spinal column. **You must stay very still while the needle is in your spine.** The fluid will drip out of the needle and into a test tube. The doctor may also measure the pressure of the fluid with a special device.
- After removing the needle, the doctor will place a small bandage on the puncture site (where the needle entered your back). You can take the bandage off the day after your test, or the next time you shower.
- You may have to get blood work done after your test. Your doctor will talk about this with you, if needed.

What will happen after the test?

- Keep laying flat for 1 to 2 hours after your test, or as told by your doctor. This is to help prevent a headache. The nurse or doctor will talk with you about how to treat a headache.
- If you have a headache, your health care team may tell you to take a mild pain pill like acetaminophen (Tylenol®) every 4 to 6 hours.

If you have a headache with a fever (temperature above 38⁰ C/100.4⁰ F), go to the nearest Emergency Department right away.

- A responsible adult should take you home. **Do not take public transportation or a taxi by yourself.**
- Rest as needed when you get home.

For 48 hours (2 days) after your test:

- › Drink plenty of fluids (6 to 8 glasses a day).
- › **Do not** swim or have a bath. It is OK to shower.

For 24 hours (1 day) after your test:

- › Avoid heavy lifting (no more than 10 pounds).
- You can remove the bandage over the puncture site 24 hours after your test.

Call the doctor who did your test or go to the nearest Emergency Department right away if you have any of the following symptoms:

- › Severe (very bad) postural headache (headache while standing up)
- › Fever (temperature above 38° C/100.4° F) or chills
- › More pain, redness, or swelling at the puncture site
- › Stiff neck

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For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

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Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit <http://ns.211.ca>

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.