



Patient & Family Guide
2017

Lumbar Puncture (LP)



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What is a lumbar puncture?

This test is sometimes called a spinal tap. A small amount of fluid is taken out from the space around your spinal cord that is fluid-filled. The cells in the fluid are studied under a microscope in a lab to check for any problems. Some of the chemical content of the fluid will also be checked.

How long does a lumbar puncture take?

It takes about 30-45 minutes.

How is the test done?

- You will be helped to a side-lying position at the edge of your bed or examining table. Your knees will be pulled 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.



- The doctor will use a needle to inject a drug to freeze your skin. This freezing is similar to dental freezing. This will sting.
- The doctor will insert a special lumbar puncture needle between the bones of your lower spinal column. You may feel some pressure but no pain.
- **You must stay very still** while the fluid drips out of the needle and into a test tube. The pressure of the fluid may also be measured with a special gauge.
- After taking the needle out, the doctor will place a small Band-Aid® on the puncture site. You can take the Band-Aid® off the day after the test or with your next shower.
- You may have to get blood work done after the lumbar puncture test.

After the test

- You should keep laying flat for 1-2 hours or as told by your doctor. This is to help prevent a headache. The nurse or doctor will tell you about how to treat a headache.
- If you do get a headache, you may take a mild pain pill such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®) every 4-6 hours.

- If you get a fever with a headache, please call your doctor or go to the Emergency Department.
- A responsible adult should take you home. **Do not take public transportation or a taxi by yourself.**
- Please rest when you get home after the test.
- Drink plenty of fluids (6-8 glasses each day).

In case of an emergency, call Locating at 902-473-2222 and ask for the neurology resident on call.

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