

Lumbar Puncture – Pediatrics

A lumbar puncture (spinal tap) is done to test the fluid (cerebrospinal fluid or CSF) around the spinal cord and brain. By placing a thin hollow needle between the bones of the lower back, a small sample of fluid can be taken for testing. Once enough fluid has been taken for testing, the needle will be removed.

A lumbar puncture can detect:

- Infection
- Inflammation
- Cancer
- Bleeding

A bandage may be placed over the site. Your child may need to lay flat for about 60 minutes after the procedure to prevent a headache.

Drink plenty of fluid after the test and over the next 1 to 2 days. These fluids will help replace the CSF fluid taken for tests. The nurse will check the puncture site for redness or swelling before you leave.

Results

The length of time before you have the results of your test varies. Some results are ready in 1 to 2 days. Others may take weeks. Results will be sent to the doctor that ordered your test. Ask in the recovery unit if you are not sure.

Home Care

- Keep resting for the rest of the day. Do quiet things like reading, watching TV, etc. **No** hard physical activity.
- Recline in bed or on a sofa, until the next morning. Keep drinking plenty of fluids. Drinks with caffeine may help with any headache.

- The morning after the test, you may take a shower and remove the band-aid. You may also resume your normal routine. **No** baths, swimming, or hot tubs for 3 days after the procedure.
- If you get a headache after starting activity, return to resting. Lay flat and increase intake of fluids with caffeine. Most headaches after lumbar puncture go away on their own after several days.
- You may take any over the counter pain killer (ibuprofen, Tylenol®, naproxen) for any pain.
- **No** heavy lifting, twisting, bending or strenuous exercise for one week to allow the puncture site to heal.

When to Call

- A severe headache that is not relieved by aspirin or acetaminophen (Tylenol®) and if it lasts longer than 5 days after the procedure.
- Dizziness
- A stiff neck
- Nausea or vomiting
- Fever

Risks

- Headache – You may have a headache after the test. It will depend on your position. It will happen when sitting or standing and resolve when laying down. This will go away on its own but let your nurse know if your headache is bad.
- Bleeding – When the needle is inserted, there is a risk of bleeding at the site. If this happens, the bleeding is often light or stops on its own. Bleeding into the spinal canal is rare.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 3/2025 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#8423.