

# Lumbar puncture (spinal tap)

## What is a lumbar puncture?

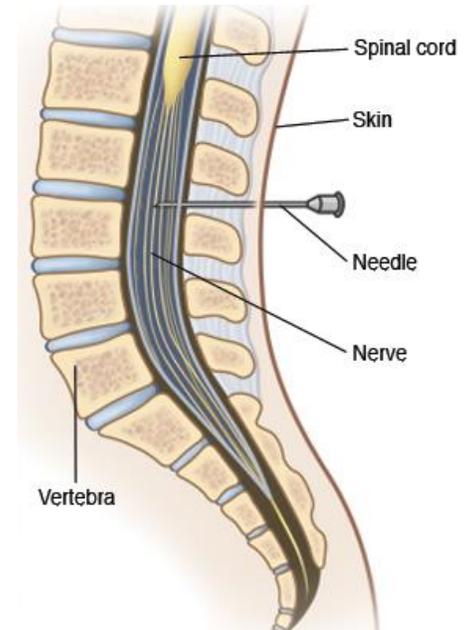
A lumbar puncture, also known as a spinal tap, is done to remove a small amount of cerebrospinal fluid. This fluid surrounds the brain and spinal cord.

## Why is it done?

A lumbar puncture is done to test the cerebrospinal fluid. Many problems can be diagnosed by testing this fluid. It can be tested for bacteria, viruses, sugar or protein. The pressure of the fluid in the spinal canal may also be measured. Your child's doctor or nurse can answer questions about this procedure and the tests that will be done.

## How is it done?

- Before the test, your child may have a cream put on their back called EMLA®. This cream helps make the skin feel numb.
- This cream will make the skin feel numb. It may take up to an hour for the cream to work.
- The doctor may inject a local anesthetic into the skin to numb the area.
- Your child will be put on their side. The nurse will help your child bring their knees up and in to the chest, arching the back. Sometimes the lumbar puncture is done with the child sitting up.
- The skin of the lower back is cleaned with an antiseptic solution. This may feel wet and cold.
- A special needle will be put into the spinal canal between two vertebrae. About 1 to 3 teaspoons of fluid will be taken for testing.
- The needle is removed, and a bandage put over the site. This test normally takes about 10 to 15 minutes.



## What follow-up care is needed?

- Your child may need to lie on their back and rest after the test. You can hold your small child. Your child can slowly increase activity as the day goes on.
- Your child should drink plenty of fluids unless fluids are limited as part of their treatment plan.
- Your child may have back pain or a headache. Ask your child's doctor or nurse what medicine should be used to help with the pain.

## When will I know the results?

The initial results of the test should be ready within a few hours. The doctor or nurse will talk with you about the results and the plan of care for your child. The culture results will be ready

in about two days. If special tests are being done on the spinal fluid, more time may be needed for those results.

### What are the possible side effects?

The following is a list of possible side effects of this procedure. If your child has these or other side effects, tell your child's doctor or nurse.

- A headache that does not go away.
- Sore back where the needle was put in.
- Drainage from the site.
- Infection at the site.
- Numbness in the legs and feet.

**ALERT:** Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child has:

- A temperature of \_\_\_\_\_ °F or \_\_\_\_\_ °C, or higher.
- A change in behavior, such as very crabby or very tired.
- Vomiting.
- Redness, swelling or drainage at the site of the lumbar puncture.
- A stiff neck.
- A headache that is severe or does not go away.
- Back pain that does not go away after lying down and resting.
- Numbness in the legs and feet.
- Special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

**This sheet was created to help you care for your child or family member. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up.**