

Lumbar puncture

Information for parents



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What is a lumbar puncture?

A lumbar puncture is a test in which the doctor uses a needle to obtain fluid from the lower back. This fluid is called “cerebro-spinal fluid” or “CSF”.

Your child lies on his or her side or sometimes sits up and is held still. The doctor puts the needle between the bones of the lower back. Lumbar puncture is also sometimes called a “spinal tap” or “LP”.

Why does my child need a lumbar puncture?

This test is often done to find out if your child has infection of or around the brain (meningitis/encephalitis). It is the only way to know for sure if your child has meningitis or not. It is also useful in the diagnosis of many other neurological conditions.

Does it hurt?

It is an uncomfortable test but usually not painful. Your child will be held still, and babies and small children do not like this and often cry.

We can help to numb the skin with some cream or with an injection. Sometimes, the doctor will recommend giving your child some medicine to make them less scared and worried.

Is it dangerous? Are there any risks?

Lumbar puncture is a very safe test. Sometimes we are not able to get fluid and may have to try more than once. A small number of children may have a headache or backache for a day or two after the test. The risk of any serious complications (bleeding or infection, damage to nerves) is extremely small. Under certain circumstances, lumbar puncture may have more risks. The doctor will explain what these are if relevant.

Do I need to do anything special after the lumbar puncture?

Your child can be bathed normally. If there is a band-aid or dressing on your child's back it can be taken off the next day. If they have a headache or sore back they can have some Paracetamol.

After a lumbar puncture you should encourage your child to drink plenty (but not excessive) fluids as this can help in preventing headache.



What did you think of your care?

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Developed by: Karen Pysden, Consultant Paediatric Neurologist
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