

# 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 and the provider will go over the results with you when they are available.

## What do I need to know before my lumbar puncture?

You will need to be driven home after this procedure so we recommend bringing a friend or family member along with you. The procedure will take about 30 - 35 minutes. This is followed by a 60 minute or more observation period.

## How is the test done?

- The practitioner will position you comfortably (either laying down or sitting up) so they can easily access your back.
- The practitioner will wipe your lower back with a special cleansing solution.
- They will then use a needle to inject medication into your lower back which numbs the site for the procedure. You should not feel any pain.
- The practitioner will insert a lumbar puncture needle between the bones of your lower spinal column. You will feel some pressure.
- The needle will be used to remove fluid from your spinal column. During the procedure you must remain still.
- After removing the needle, the practitioner will place a small bandage on the puncture site (where the needle entered your back).
- You may have to get blood work done before and/or after your test. Your practitioner will talk about this with you, if needed.

## What will happen after the test?

- Your practitioner will ask you to lay flat for a period of time after the procedure.
- If you have a headache, you may take a mild pain pill like acetaminophen (Tylenol®) every 4 to 6 hours.
- **Before taking Tylenol, take your temperature.** If you have a fever, go to the nearest emergency department right away.

- Caffeine (coffee, a caffeine pill, Coca-Cola or Pepsi) may also help lessen a headache after this procedure.

**If you have a fever (temperature above 38<sup>0</sup> C/100.4<sup>0</sup> F), go to the nearest Emergency Department right away.**

**For 24 hours (1 day) after your test:**

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

**For 48 hours (2 days) after your test:**

- Drink plenty of fluids (2 litres). Please note that caffeinated beverages do not count towards your daily fluid total.

**Call the practitioner who did your test or go to the nearest Emergency Department right away if:**

- your headache cannot be managed with Tylenol
- you have a fever (temperature above 38<sup>0</sup> C/100.4<sup>0</sup> F) or chills
- you develop pain, redness or swelling at the puncture site
- you develop a stiff neck

**Patient and family feedback is very important to us.**

**We would like to invite you to send any comments or suggestions on how to improve this booklet to [education.cancercare@nshealth.ca](mailto:education.cancercare@nshealth.ca) or feel free to call us at 1-866-599-2267.**

*Prepared by: Nova Scotia Health Cancer Care Program  
NSHCCP4073 © July 2024 Nova Scotia Health Authority*

*This pamphlet is for educational purposes only.*

*It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider.*

*If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.*