Patient Information

Lumbar Puncture

Raigmore Hospital
Inverness
What is a lumbar puncture?

A lumbar puncture or “LP” is a procedure which is used to obtain a sample of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF). This is the fluid that bathes, protects and cushions your brain and spinal cord. This fluid can hold important clues about the health of the brain and spinal cord.

Why might I need a lumbar puncture?

A lumbar puncture may be needed to measure fluid pressure, remove fluid to reduce pressure in the skull or to aid diagnosis. such as infection, bleeding in the brain and some neurological conditions.

What does the procedure involve?

There are two methods of performing a lumbar puncture- sitting up and lying down. We most commonly use the technique involving lying down. You will be asked to lie on your side and hug your legs, so that your back is curved in a “C” shape. During the procedure, it is very important that you stay very still. Tell the practitioner if you are uncomfortable or do not think you can stay still in the position.

The practitioner will clean the area around your lower back (at the level of your hip) with antiseptic and place a sterile drape over your lower back. You will then be given an injection of local anaesthetic to numb the area, this may sting.

Once the area goes numb the practitioner will gently insert a sterile lumbar puncture needle through the skin between two of the bones that make up the spine. You may experience a
momentary pain down one leg if the needle touches a nerve. This is just nerve irritation and not damage. Once the needle is in the correct position the practitioner may measure the pressure of the fluid and collect a small amount of fluid for analysis. Once enough fluid has been collected the spinal needle is removed and a plaster applied.

The procedure usually takes around half an hour but can take longer.

You may also need to have a blood sample taken at the time of the Lumbar puncture.

**Are there any risks from this procedure?**

Lumbar puncture is a very safe procedure. Occasionally it may be difficult to obtain spinal fluid, especially if you are overweight, have previously had lumbar back surgery or spine deformity. The procedure may need to be performed by a radiologist using a scanning technique if initial attempts are unsuccessful.

The most common side effect is headache, around a third of patients experience headache which can be worse with sitting or standing up and relieved by lying down. If this occurs drink plenty of fluid, take simple analgesia and lie down. If your headache is severe or persists for more than 48 hours, seek medical attention.

Rare complications following lumbar puncture include Infection, bleeding and nerve root damage. The paragraph “What should I do after lumbar puncture?“ below explains any symptoms that may require medical advice.
Before having an LP, tell the practitioner if you take aspirin or a medicine called warfarin or any other type of medicine that is used to “thin” the blood or prevent blood clots. These can increase your risk of bleeding during the procedure.

What should I do after a lumbar puncture?

Make sure you drink plenty of fluids over the next 24 hours and avoid strenuous exercise for a few days. There are no special instructions after a lumbar puncture and you should not suffer any ill effects. If you do get a headache take simple analgesia like paracetamol for the first 24 hours. Some people find caffeine drinks effective to relieve headache after lumbar puncture.

Seek immediate medical advice if you experience any of the symptoms below:

• Your headaches are severe or don’t go away.
• You have a high temperature or feel hot/shivery.
• It’s painful to look at bright lights
• You develop swelling in your lower back.
• You have any new or ongoing leg pain, tingling or numbness or have difficulty passing urine.

When will I receive results?

It depends on what tests are being done and we will advise you when we carry out the procedure. Some tests can take several weeks and we will write to your GP once we receive these results.
# Patient Consent Form for Lumbar Puncture

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I confirm the procedure and important risks/potential complications have been explained to me.

I understand and agree to the procedure described on this form.

I understand the person performing the procedure will have appropriate training and/or supervision.

*Patient’s signature*: .................................................................

*Print Name*: ........................................... *Date*: .................

**A witness must sign below if the patient is unable to sign but has indicated their consent**

*Signed*: ................................................................. *Date*: .................

*Witness Name (PRINT)*: .................................................................