

Neurosciences

Lumbar puncture

An information leaflet for patients having a Lumbar Puncture on the Neurology Day Case Unit

This leaflet is designed to answer any basic questions you may have about your Lumbar Puncture (LP). It is quite likely that you'll have more questions, so please feel free to ask the doctor or nurse looking after you

What is a Lumbar Puncture (LP)?

It is a procedure that involves using a needle to remove some of the cerebrospinal fluid, or CSF, which is the fluid that surrounds the brain and spinal cord.

Why is the procedure necessary?

There are two reasons why you might have an LP:

- **To diagnose a neurological condition:**

The doctor can take a sample of CSF, which will be used to help the doctors decide what is wrong with you.

- **To treat a neurological condition:**

If the pressure of the CSF is too high, the doctors may do a lumbar puncture to remove some of the fluid.



Patient Information

Who will perform the LP?

One of the ward doctors will perform the Lumbar Puncture. They will come and see you beforehand in order to discuss the procedure and complete a consent form. This is a good opportunity to ask any questions you have, or talk about any worries you have about the procedure.

Important

It is necessary for you to attend for a blood test prior to your lumbar Puncture (Full Blood Count and INR)

Please find necessary form enclosed. Attend with the blood request form for this test to be done in advance of the above date. **(For patients on Warfarin ONLY INR needs to be no more than 1.3 for the procedure.)** Please note that it will **not** be possible to proceed with your planned Lumbar Puncture without this blood test.

Please inform your consultant's secretary if you are on any anti coagulants such as aspirin or warfarin, as you may need further blood tests prior to the appointment.

Contact the hospital switchboard on 024 7696 4000 and ask for your consultant's secretary or contact the number given on your letter.

What kind of preparation is necessary?

You will need to lie down in a special position. This is usually on your left side with your knees bent. It is important to wear loose clothing, or a hospital gown, as you will need to stay in the same position and keep as still as possible while you have the lumbar puncture. There is no need to stop eating or drinking before the LP.

Will I need an anaesthetic?

Yes, you will need a local anaesthetic. Once you are lying down in the correct position the doctor will examine your lower back. They will clean an area on your back with antiseptic and give you an injection which will make a small patch of skin go numb.

What happens during the procedure?

Once the skin is numb, the doctor will push a needle through the skin in the area between the spinal bones, into the space containing the spinal fluid (CSF). The doctor will then attach a thin tube to the needle so that they can measure the pressure of the CSF. They will let some fluid drip out from the needle so that it can be collected and sent to the lab to be tested. What it is tested for will depend on your individual condition. The doctor will then take the needle out and put a sticky plaster on your back. You need to tell the doctor beforehand if you are allergic to plasters.

How long will it take?

The procedure itself takes around 15-20 minutes, but this can vary.

Will it hurt?

The local anaesthetic will make the skin numb for about 45 minutes, so it will not hurt when the needle goes in. You may feel some pushing and pulling as the needle goes further in. Some people get a momentary shooting pain or electric shock feeling down their leg.

What happens after the LP?

You will need to rest on the ward for two hours after the LP. A patient call bell will be available should you require any assistance or support during this time. It is not advisable to drive immediately after your lumbar puncture, and we advise you to arrange for a friend or relative to accompany you home afterwards.

Are there any likely side effects?

Post lumbar puncture headache and lower back pain can occur.

How do I recognise a post lumbar puncture headache?

This type of headache usually comes on within one or two days of a lumbar puncture and usually lasts for about two days. It is made worse by standing and is relieved by lying down. If you get a headache like this, you should rest in bed, lying as flat as possible for as long as necessary. It may help to drink plenty of fluids, ideally water, but you may find drinks containing caffeine (tea or coffee) may help. You should take simple painkillers such as paracetamol.

Patient Information

Is the LP dangerous?

No, it is not. Serious problems like meningitis or nerve root damage after lumbar punctures are very rare. If the doctors think you are at risk of developing serious side effects, they will not perform the LP.

What should I do if I feel unwell at home following the procedure?

If you get a headache after your LP that persists for more than three days, you should go and see your GP or contact the doctors and nurses on the ward:

Tel. 024 7696 5233 between 8.00am and 3.00pm Monday to Friday

Serious side effects are very rare, but if you experience any of the following symptoms you should seek medical help immediately, either by calling the number on this leaflet or by going to your nearest Accident and Emergency department:

- Double or blurred vision
- Loss of consciousness
- Drowsiness
- Weakness of your arms legs or face,
- Bleeding from the area of the LP,
- Vomiting.

Will it make any difference to my normal activities?

You will probably be able to go back to work within 24 – 48 hours, unless you develop a headache, in which case you should not go back to work until your headache has gone and you feel better.

You should wait at least 24 hours before swimming or bathing, and keep the area dry until the next day.

You should also avoid strenuous exercise or heavy lifting for at least 48 hours after the LP.

Patient Information

Are there any alternatives?

This depends on the reason you are having the LP. In some situations, if the LP is very difficult to perform, it can be done with the guidance of an X-Ray machine to make the LP easier to carry out.

Trust Contact: **Day Case Unit** - 024 7696 5233

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please ask on the number above and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy

To give feedback on this leaflet please email: feedback@uhcw.nhs.uk

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