

# Lumbar puncture

## What is a lumbar puncture?

This test takes a sample of the fluid called cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) that surrounds the brain and spinal cord. A lumbar puncture can also be used to give certain drugs.

## Why do I need to have this test?

Lumbar punctures are done for different reasons, including:

- to look for any cancer cells in the CSF
- to give chemotherapy
- to give drugs to relieve pain
- to look for possible signs of infection
- to check the pressure of the fluid in the brain.

## What happens?

### Before the test

Your doctor or specialist nurse will explain what will happen. You can have a family member or a friend with you during the test, if you want to.

You might have this test under a general anaesthetic. This means you will be asleep and will not be aware of what is happening, or be able to feel anything. You will be asked to not eat and drink for six hours before having general anaesthetic

Or you might have it under a local anaesthetic. This means you will stay awake, but the doctor will give you an injection to numb the area so you can't feel it.

### During the test

During the test, you either sit forward in a chair, or lie on your side with your knees curled up. You will feel some pressure or pushing, but it should not be painful. The doctor or nurse gently puts the needle in-between two of the bones in your lower back (vertebrae). Then they use the needle to take out a small amount of the fluid for testing. Or they can inject chemotherapy drugs in through the needle. What happens during the test depends on why you are having a lumbar puncture.

When they have finished, they take the needle out and put a small dressing on the area.

### After the test

If you had a general anaesthetic, you might feel a bit tired or sick for a few hours afterwards. Your nurse can give you drugs to help with any sickness. If you had local anaesthetic, you will not feel sick.

Some people might have a headache afterwards. Your doctor or nurse may ask you to lie down for a while to help stop this happening. Drinking more fluids may also help. The nurse will tell you when you can go home. They can give you advice and tell you what painkillers to take.

You might have some backpain or a headache for a couple of days. If you notice any bleeding or oozing from the area, let your doctor or nurse know. Contact your GP or the hospital if you:

- feel unwell
- develop a temperature
- have a headache for more than two days.

Waiting for test results can be a worrying time. Talking to your family and friends about how you feel can help. You can also speak to your doctor or nurse if you have any problems, or if you need more support.