

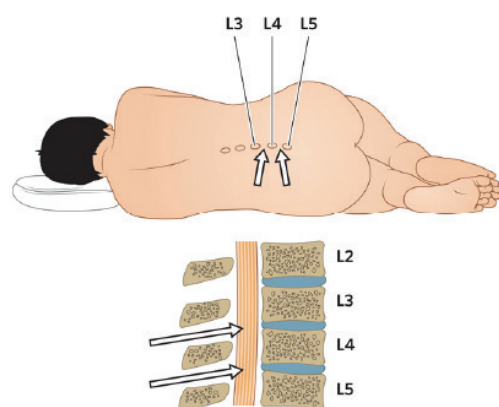
Lumbar punctures in children

Information for parents and/or caregivers

Welcome to the Southern Adelaide Local Health Network. This Information sheet aims to answer any questions you may have about your child having a lumbar puncture.

What is a Lumbar Puncture?

A lumbar puncture (LP) is a test where a doctor inserts a needle into the lower back in order to get a specimen of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF). This is the fluid that flows around the brain and spine. The needle is inserted into the area of the back below the spinal cord.



Why is a lumbar puncture done?

A lumbar puncture assists in detecting the presence of disease or injury, relief of pressure and / or the administration of intrathecal medication. Your doctor will explain the reason for the lumbar puncture.

How is a Lumbar Puncture done?

The doctor or nurse may or may not put some cream on the area where the needle is to go to numb it. Under some circumstances the child may be given light sedation or a general anaesthetic for this procedure.

Your doctor will discuss the risks and benefits if sedation is required. The lumbar puncture may be done with the child sitting or lying. Your child needs to stay very still during the lumbar puncture.

The nurse will gently but firmly hold your child to help keep them still. If it is being done in the lying position, they will need to lie on their side with their knees up near their chin so that their spine is in a curved position.

The doctor will clean your child's skin before he/she inserts the needle. A few drops of CSF are then collected into specimen containers. These are then sent to the laboratory. Results are usually available within a few hours.

The needle is taken out and a Band-Aid or small dressing may be placed over where the needle was inserted.

Your child may find this test uncomfortable as they have to be so still and also they may have some discomfort when the needle is inserted.

What Problems Might Occur

The doctor will make sure that it is safe for your child to have a lumbar puncture. There are few side effects from a lumbar puncture. The doctor will explain these to you when he/she obtains your consent for the lumbar puncture.

Some children may have pain where the needle went in. There may be a small amount of swelling around this area which should disappear within a couple of days.

Some children may have a headache for a day after the test. Spinal cord injury is extremely unlikely in children with a normal spine and spinal cord. Complications such as infection and nerve damage are rare.

Sometimes we are not able to get fluid and may have to try more than once to obtain a specimen.

Make sure you ask the doctor any questions that you might have.

After the test

If your child complains of headache or back pain after the lumbar puncture they may be given some mild pain relief. If this becomes severe or lasts longer than 24 hours you should seek medical attention.

It is important that your child takes time to rest after the test.

Advice to parents and caregivers

You should seek medical attention if your child experiences any of the following:

A severe headache or a headache lasting more than 24 hours after LP

- Severe back pain
- Signs of infection including a temperature
- Any redness, swelling, pain, bleeding or discharge from the LP site
- Any numbness in the lower back or legs
- Any difficulty in urinating
- Any changes in your child's conscious state.

For more information

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