



# Lumbar Puncture - Spinal Tap

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## **What is an LP?**

A lumbar puncture (LP) or spinal tap is a procedure in which a small amount of the Cerebral Spinal Fluid (CSF) is removed by inserting a needle into the in the lumbar portion (the “small”) of the back. CSF surrounds the brain and spinal cord. CSF circulates around the brain and spinal cord and helps to protect the brain from injury.

## **Why is an LP done?**

An LP is done to diagnose a disease, such as Meningitis, Encephalitis, Multiple Sclerosis, or the elevated CSF pressure found in Pseudotumor Cerebri.

An LP is diagnostic and therapeutic in patients with Pseudotumor Cerebri. The LP measures the CSF pressure and at the same time, it will lower the spinal fluid pressure by removing CSF fluid. The patient will often have dramatic relief from his headache.

## **How is the LP performed?**

The patient will be asked to lie on his side in a curled up position. It is important for him to lie as still as he can. Less often, the procedure is performed while the patient is sitting up. After a local anesthesia is injected into the small of the back (the lumbar area), a needle is inserted. The patient may feel some pressure and a slight soreness when the needle first goes in.



## **What are the risks?**

Headache is the most common side effect. It can happen hours or up to a day after the LP. Rarely, bleeding or infection may occur. There is virtually no risk of damage to the spinal cord. The needle does **not** enter the spinal cord itself, but the sack of fluid below the spinal cord.

## **What about Lumbar Puncture headache?**

To prevent a headache, the patient should lie flat for a few hours after the test. Sitting or standing will make the headache worse. The headache is caused by a leakage of CSF through the hole made by the spinal needle. Usually the hole closes on its own after the LP. Tylenol or ibuprofen may help the pain. Increasing the patient’s fluid intake and having him drink caffeine products can help. If the headache continues, the patient may need a blood patch, where a small amount of the patient’s blood is injected into the spinal needle’s hole.

## **The results**

Understandably, waiting for results can make the patient anxious. If the doctor is checking for an elevated CSF pressure, he can tell you at the time of the test. Routine test such as glucose, protein and a cell count are done the same day. Some specialized tests may take over a week for the results to come back.

