

WHAT IS A LUMBAR PUNCTURE?

LP BASICS



A lumbar puncture (LP) may also be called a spinal tap. During an LP, a doctor takes a small amount of fluid from your spinal cord to examine under a microscope. Your spinal cord is a tube-like structure filled with fluid inside of your spine. Your spine is part of your skeleton and helps you stand, move, and stretch. Doctors can learn a lot about your body's health by looking at your spinal fluid.

STEP ONE

During an LP, your doctor will have you lay on your side with your knees tucked up to your chest or sit up leaning your arms over a pillow. Imagine a toy slinky. When it is standing still the coils are closed. When it bends and moves, it opens space between the coils. Your spine acts the same way inside your body. When you bend your back, your spine stretches and opens space to your spinal cord.



STEP TWO

You will feel your doctor touch your back with their hand. You may feel pushing as they press along your spine, finding the best spot for the procedure.

STEP THREE

This procedure is "sterile," which means it is very clean. There are three steps to make sure everything stays clean during your procedure. First, the doctor will put on sterile gloves. They can now only touch you and the medical equipment. Second, a blue cloth will be placed on your back to mark the procedure area. Third, your doctor will clean your back 3 times with a soapy sponge that may feel cold, wet, and scratchy.



STEP FOUR

The doctor will inject numbing medicine into the skin on your back. This medicine is called Lidocaine and will help you not feel pain for the rest of the procedure. The Lidocaine may sting when it is first injected. That stinging sensation typically goes away within 10 seconds.

STEP FIVE

A needle will be inserted into your spinal cord. You may feel pressure, but you should not feel anything sharp. If you do, mention it right away. You may need more Lidocaine.



STEP SIX

Fluid is collected from the needle inserted in your spinal cord. To collect even a small amount takes some time. Your job is to hold as still as you can throughout the procedure.

STEP SEVEN

Once the fluid is collected, the needle will be removed. Your doctor will wipe your back with a wet cloth and a band-aid will be placed where the needle was.



STEP EIGHT

Some people experience headaches after an LP. To prevent this from happening to you, your doctor will instruct you to lay flat for a certain amount of time.

COPING

While getting an LP can be stressful, there are many ways to make the process easier.

Relax your body.

While it may seem difficult, keeping your body relaxed will help you get through the procedure.

- Take deep breaths, counting to 5 as you inhale and then counting to 5 as you exhale
- Listen to music or watch a video
- Imagine how your body feels when you are relaxed
 - Where are you?
 - What are you doing?
 - Who are you with?

Tell the medical team what might help you feel more comfortable.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Would you like a support person to sit next to you or hold your hand?
- Would you like a 1-2-3 countdown before the poke?