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Lumbar Puncture: Information for Parents

A lumbar puncture, also known as a “spinal tap,” is a procedure your baby needs in which cerebral spinal fluid (CSF) will be collected. CSF is the colorless liquid that is contained in your infant’s back (spine) and around their brain and acts as a “cushion” to the brain and spinal cord. In a lumbar puncture, this fluid is carefully collected with a needle inserted into your baby’s back (much like an epidural for moms in labor) and will be sent for testing.

Common reasons that a lumbar puncture may be indicated for your child

* to help determine if your baby has an infection in the spinal fluid (meningitis)
* to remove excessive spinal fluid buildup when certain conditions are present.

# Procedure

In most instances, after your provider has discussed the need for the procedure and has explained the risks and benefits, you will need to complete a consent form. Before doing a lumbar puncture, a numbing cream may be applied to the area of the spine where the lumbar puncture will take place. Sometimes, the provider may use a local anesthetic to numb the site on your baby’s back. Other comfort measures can be done for your baby during the procedure, such as offering a sucrose pacifier. A hollow needle is then inserted between the bones (called the vertebrae) of your baby’s back. A sample of the CSF is collected through the needle and sent for testing. A small dressing will be used to cover the site where the needle was inserted.

# Risks and Benefits

The information obtained from the fluid testing can give life-saving and diagnostic information to your healthcare team. There are a few risks, which include

* infection where the needle was inserted in to the back
* bleeding into the spinal canal or leakage of fluid from the spinal canal
* injury to the spinal cord itself (very rare).

If your baby requires a lumbar puncture, don’t be afraid to ask questions. Try to remind yourself that the procedure is necessary to make an accurate diagnosis and provide the best possible treatment for your baby. In some cases, a lumbar puncture is the only way to gain information on the nature of your baby’s illness.



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