



After a lumbar puncture

You had a lumbar puncture in the emergency department. A thin needle was placed in your lower back to take a small sample of the fluid around your brain and spine. The doctor will tell you about the results. This sheet explains how to look after yourself afterwards.

What is it?

A lumbar puncture is a common and safe test. Afterwards, it is normal to have some soreness where the needle went in. Some people get a headache over the next few days. This happens when a little fluid leaks from the needle hole. The headache is usually worse when sitting or standing and better when lying flat. It normally goes away within a week.

Looking after yourself at home

- Rest for the rest of the day. You can return to normal activities tomorrow if you feel well.
- Drink plenty of fluids. Drinks with caffeine, such as coffee or tea, may help a headache.
- If you have a headache, lie flat. It often feels better lying down.
- Avoid heavy lifting and hard exercise for a few days.
- Keep the small dressing clean and dry, and remove it after 24 hours.
- Do not drive today, and do not drive if you have a headache.

Medicines

- Paracetamol can help with back soreness or headache, unless your doctor told you not to. Follow the packet or your doctor's instructions.
- Ibuprofen can also help, unless your doctor told you not to. Avoid it if you have a stomach ulcer, kidney disease, some asthma, or are pregnant.

Follow-up

- Follow the plan your doctor gave you for getting your results.
- See your family doctor or health centre if a headache lasts more than 5 days or stops you doing daily activities.

Come back to the emergency department or call an ambulance straight away if:

- A severe headache that does not ease when you lie flat
- Fever, a stiff neck, or a rash that does not fade when pressed
- Redness, swelling, pus or clear fluid leaking from the needle site
- New numbness, weakness or tingling in your legs
- Loss of control of your bladder or bowels
- Confusion, repeated vomiting, a seizure (fit), or unusual drowsiness



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This leaflet is general information to support the advice your doctor or nurse gave you today. It does not replace their advice. If you are worried, seek medical help.

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