

Let's Talk About...

Lumbar Puncture in a Newborn

What is a lumbar puncture?

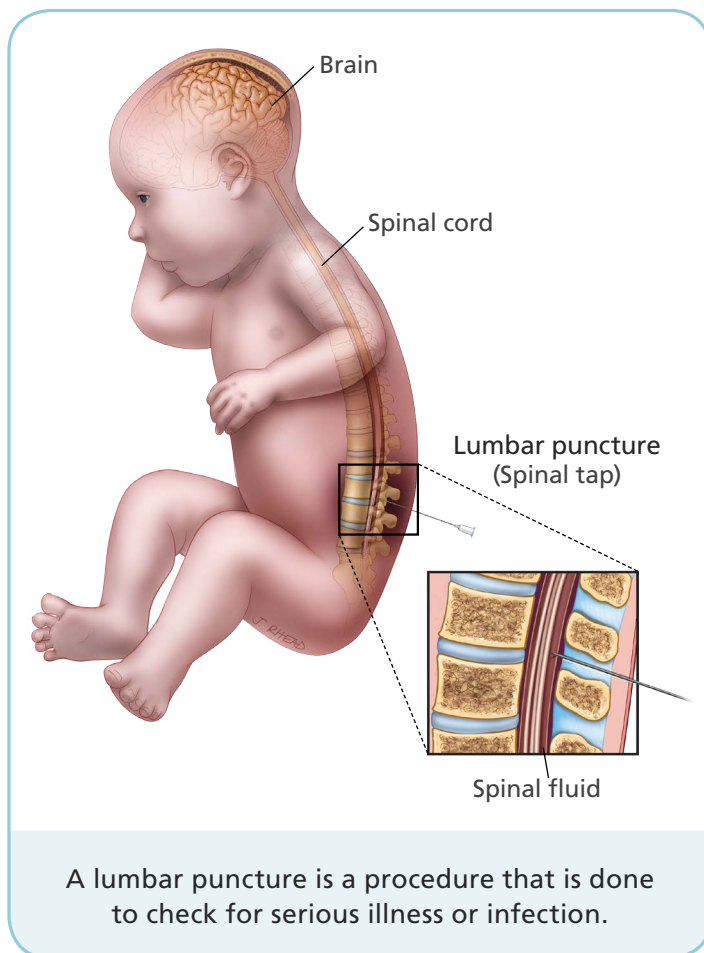
A **lumbar puncture** (spinal tap) is a procedure used to collect a small amount of spinal fluid. **Spinal fluid** is a clear liquid that surrounds the brain and spinal cord.

Why does my baby need a lumbar puncture?

A **lumbar puncture** is usually done to check for **serious illness or infection**. By testing the sample of spinal fluid, your baby's doctor can determine whether your baby has meningitis or another illness. They can also check for bleeding around the brain and spine.

How is a lumbar puncture done?

- **Before.** The doctor first cleans the skin where the needle will go in and may use a numbing medicine in a cream or injection (shot).
- **During.** To get the sample of spinal fluid, your baby's doctor will put a small, hollow needle into the lower part of your baby's back while a nurse or other care provider holds your baby in a curled-up position. The doctor will then insert the hollow needle into the spinal canal and remove a small amount of fluid. Finally, the doctor will remove the needle and clean and bandage the area where the needle was inserted. The whole process can take up to an hour.
- **After.** The collected spinal fluid will be sent to a lab to be tested. Your doctor will share the results with you as soon as possible.



What does a lumbar puncture feel like?

A lumbar puncture may be uncomfortable. Your baby may feel coldness and wetness while their back is cleaned. If numbing medicine is given with a shot, it will sting when it first goes in. Also, when the hollow needle goes in, your baby may feel pressure and perhaps a few seconds of pain. To help comfort your baby during the procedure, the care team may provide a pacifier or some other comfort measure.

(continued on back)

Talking with your baby’s doctor about this treatment

The following table lists the most common benefits, risks, and alternatives for this treatment. Other benefits and risks may apply in your child’s unique medical situation. The conversation you have with your child’s healthcare provider is the most important part of learning about these benefits and risks. If you have questions, be sure to ask.

Potential benefits	Risks and potential complications	Alternatives
A lumbar puncture provides valuable information about your newborn’s health. In some cases, the information is life saving.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Infection where the spinal fluid was drawn• Bleeding into the spinal canal or leakage of fluid from the canal• Damage to the spinal cord (very rare)	In some cases, a lumbar puncture is the only way to learn what is making your baby sick.



Questions for my baby’s doctor

Your baby’s providers can tell you what to expect from this or any other part of your baby’s hospital care. **Please ask.**
