

INFORMATION REGARDING YOUR SPINAL TAP

Name: _____ Appt On: _____ Location: _____

Your doctor has recommended that you have a diagnostic spinal tap or lumbar puncture. This is a minor procedure easily performed in the office with modern medical techniques and equipment. Your doctor is highly trained, experienced and will use the utmost care in performing this study.

NOT A “SPINAL”: Spinal taps are sometimes confused with “spinals” or spinal anesthesia. This form of anesthesia is sometimes used in women during childbirth. The side effects of spinal anesthesia are much more frequent and severe than after a diagnostic spinal tap. This is because the anesthesiologist is injecting a medication into the spinal canal and also to the less than ideal conditions during labor and delivery.

WHY ME! Spinal taps or lumbar punctures are performed to obtain a small amount of fluid (usually less than a tablespoon), which bathes the brain and spine. Commonly, the spinal fluid pressure is checked. Spinal fluid analysis is helpful in the diagnosis of inflammatory and infectious conditions such as meningitis, encephalitis and multiple sclerosis. Sometimes, spinal taps are used to aid in the diagnosis of headaches or visual difficulties.

WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT? You will be asked to lie on your side or sit at the end of the examining table. You may need to wear a gown so that the lower back or lumbar area can be approached. An antiseptic solution will be applied and the back draped. A small area will be anesthetized (numbed) so that you don’t feel any pain. A sterile needle will then be inserted between two of the vertebral (spine) bones. Contrary to popular belief, the needle is not placed anywhere near the spinal cord. The spinal fluid pressure may be measured and fluid obtained for laboratory analysis. This part of the study takes about twenty minutes.

HOW ABOUT AFTERWARDS? After the spinal tap is completed, you will be asked to lie quietly on your back for twenty to thirty minutes. You can then go about your business as before. There are no restrictions. You can drive or return to work, if you desire.

ARE THERE ANY SIDE EFFECTS? Most patients do not get any side effects. You may have transient tingling of your leg during a spinal tap. Some patients have temporary mild discomfort in the small of the back during or after the procedure. If need be, you can take acetaminophen or Tylenol. Occasionally, a patient may get a headache for a few days. If this occurs, you will be asked to stay in bed and drink plenty of fluids. There is a remote and very rare possibility of an infection or bleeding after a spinal tap. Call us immediately if you develop a fever, change in mental status or confusion, weakness or numbness of the legs, or stiff neck after a spinal tap.

WHAT DO YOU DO WITH THE SPINAL FLUID? You will be asked to take your spinal fluid to the nearest hospital laboratory for analysis. Your physician will inform you where you need to take the fluid. You may have to get your blood drawn when you bring your specimen to the laboratory.