

What is a Myelogram?

PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

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A myelogram is a radiology test that allows doctors to see the spinal cord and its nerve roots. Nerve signals travel back and forth between the body and the brain through the spinal cord and its nerves. The spinal cord and nerves run within a central canal in the bones of the spinal column and are surrounded by a clear fluid called cerebrospinal fluid (CSF). During the myelogram, a thin needle is inserted into the CSF space which surrounds the spinal cord and nerves and contrast is injected, allowing your doctor to see an outline of the spinal cord and nerves on x-rays and on CT scan.

How do I prepare for the procedure?

No solid food should be taken after midnight prior to your study. However, fluids are encouraged, unless restricted by your doctor. On the day of the exam, you may have a full liquid breakfast, such as milk, milkshakes, coffee with milk or cream, but do not eat any solid foods. If you are having the myelogram on an outpatient basis, plan to arrive at the hospital 90 minutes before your scheduled appointment. Because x-rays are used during this procedure, **it is important to let your doctor and the x-ray technologist know if there is any possibility that you may be pregnant.**

Certain medications may need to be stopped prior to the day of your procedure, so it is important to review with your doctor all of the medications you are currently taking. You will receive special orders from your doctor, but in general:

- Glucophage is withheld the day of the procedure and stopped for 2 days **after** the procedure.
- Aspirin containing products are stopped at least 5 days **prior** to the procedure.
- Blood-thinning medications (such as Coumadin and Lovenox) are stopped 3 days **prior** to the procedure.

Are there any risks involved with this procedure?

In general, a myelogram is a safe procedure. There are some risks or complications that may occur. These include:

- A severe headache, nausea, and/or vomiting
- An allergic reaction to the iodine contrast or the numbing medicine. Tell your doctor if you are aware of allergies to either of these or to shellfish.
- On rare occasions, there may be injury to the nerves, seizures, or bleeding.
- For female patients, **if there is any possibility you may be pregnant or if you are breast feeding, it is important to tell this to the technologist before the myelogram.**

How is a myelogram performed?

- Written consent will be obtained for the procedure.
- You will be asked to lie still on your stomach.
- The skin on your lower back will be cleansed with an antiseptic.
- A local anesthetic will be used to numb the injection site.
- A needle will then be inserted into your spinal canal.
- A small amount of cerebrospinal fluid will be removed.
- The contrast will then be injected. This may feel slightly uncomfortable and you may feel a warm sensation. Notify your doctor if you experience pain.
- The needle will then be taken out. X-rays and a CT scan will then be completed.

Are there any special precautions after the procedure?

After the procedure you will be monitored and asked to lie on your back for two hours with your head slightly elevated. This helps to prevent headache, nausea, and vomiting. If you are having the myelogram done as an outpatient, **you will need someone to drive you home.** Unless restricted by your doctor, it is important to drink plenty of water after the procedure.

A formal report will be sent to your doctor within days following your procedure. Your doctor will speak with you regarding the results.

Are there discharge instructions if I go home after the procedure?

1. Go home and rest quietly for the remainder of the day. You may resume normal activities the following day.
2. Try to keep your head elevated at all times. When in bed, prop your head up on two pillows. Do not allow your head to be lower than the rest of your body.
3. You may resume your usual diet after the procedure. Drink extra water and avoid alcoholic beverages for 24 hours.
4. The incidence of headache, nausea, or vomiting is low and is usually not a cause for concern. These symptoms may occur immediately or several days following the procedure. Drinking extra water will help this. A severe persistent headache, nausea, and/or vomiting should be reported to your physician.
5. Weakness and discomfort in the legs, arms, and eye muscles can occur following the Myelogram. They should go away in 24 hours. If this continues, report it to your physician.

References: Greenwich Hospital Diagnostic Imaging Department
The Patient Education Institute, Inc. (2001). Retrieved 9/04 from www.X-Plain.com
University of Maryland Medicine. (2003). Retrieved 9/04 from www.umm.edu

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