



# London Health Sciences Centre

## Discharge Instructions

### GOING HOME AFTER A SPINAL TAP, EPIDURAL INJECTION, OR SPINAL ANESTHETIC

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#### **Definition and background information:**

Procedures such as spinal tap, epidural, or spinal anesthesia involve a needle being placed inside the bone through the tough ligament that protects the spinal cord. One of the risks of these procedures is that you may get a headache. This headache can be moderate to severe. It usually presents 12 to 24 hours after a spinal tap or spinal anesthesia, but can occur up to 3 days after the procedure. This headache happens when cerebral spinal fluid leaks through a puncture hole made by the needle during the procedure. This can be a very unpleasant experience, but with treatment it can be gone in 48 hours. Without treatment, it could last up to 7 days.

#### **Symptoms:**

A dull, aching or throbbing headache may be noticed in the forehead and around the top of your head. It may feel mild to severe. This pain increases with sitting and standing and gets better when lying down.

*You may also feel:*

- Stiff neck
- Dizziness
- Ringing in the ears or loss of hearing
- Nausea
- Visual changes such as double vision

#### **When to seek medical advice:**

Tell your doctor if you develop a headache after a spinal tap or spinal anesthesia - especially if the headache gets worse when you sit up or stand.

#### **Treatment:**

1. Lie down. This won't get rid of the headache, but most people with spinal headaches get some relief from lying down.
2. Hydrate. Drink plenty of water. It is important to increase the pressure in the cerebral spinal fluid. It may be possible to do this by just drinking plenty of fluids.
3. Drink something with caffeine. Caffeine constricts (narrows) blood vessels, which helps boost pressure in the spinal fluid.

4. Take medication for headache - such as opioid analgesics such as Percocets, acetaminophen, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medication (NSAIDS).
5. Rest for 24 to 48 hours
6. Contact your doctor if none of these methods help (within 2 to 3 days after the original procedure). A procedure called a blood patch is a treatment option an anesthesiologist can perform. This involves taking a small amount of blood from you, and then injecting it near the puncture hole made during the original procedure. Your blood clots and seals the leak.

It is also possible to get an infection or blood collection, whenever the skin is broken. If this occurs you may experience one or more of the following symptoms:

- Swelling in seen around the injection site
- Fluid is draining from the injection site
- Redness and warmth at the injection site
- Pain at the injection site that does not go away after 24 hours
- Chills and fever with a temperature more than 38°C or 101°F
- Trouble passing your water or emptying your bladder
- Numbness and tingling in your legs
- Leg weakness

**To reach the anesthesiologists on-call at any of  
the three London Hospitals telephone**

**519-685-8500**



**Ask the operator to page the anesthesiologist on-call at the  
hospital where the procedure was performed.**

**If you need immediate attention, go to the  
Emergency Department of the hospital closest to you.**