Exam Information

Diagnostic Imaging

What is a Cisternogram?

Cisternography uses a small amount of radioactive material (no side effects) to evaluate the flow of cerebral spinal fluid around the brain and spinal cord. It is usually done in the diagnosis of normal pressure hydrocephalus, detection of cerebral spinal fluid leaks, and for the evaluation of ventricular shunt patency.

How is the exam performed?

A technologist will bring you down on a stretcher from the Day Surgery area. A doctor will use fluoroscopy (real-time, moving x-ray pictures) to insert a needle into the space around the spinal cord. A radioactive material will be injected into the spinal fluid. Following this lumbar puncture procedure, you should remain on your back for 4 hours. The technologist will bring you to the Nuclear Medicine department on a stretcher, and will take pictures over the injection site while you are lying down. After imaging, you will return to the Day Surgery area until the radiologist permits you to leave. You will need to return to Nuclear Medicine for imaging at 24, 48, and possibly 72 hours.

This test takes 2 to 3 days to complete. The technologist will inform you if 72 hour imaging is necessary. Each day, imaging will take approximately 30 minutes.

How should I prepare for the exam?

- Refer to prep instructions for lumbar puncture procedure.

What will I feel during the exam?

There will be some discomfort during the lumbar puncture on the first day. There are no side effects to the radioactive material.

Who interprets the exam and when will I get my results?

After the exam, a radiologist who is specially trained to interpret Cisternograms will review your images and send a written report to the physician that ordered the exam for you. That physician will then contact you with your results.