

Myelogram

A myelogram, or CT myelogram, is a diagnostic imaging procedure that is a great alternative to MRI, and can detect many of the causes of back pain. It can also aid in surgery planning, especially if there is spinal instrumentation already present.

Risks and Benefits

A CT myelogram combines the strengths of both a traditional CT and a MRI. A CT usually has better resolution and fewer artifacts from hardware, while a MRI can better depict the spinal canal and nerves. A CT myelogram can do it all, but this advantage does come with increased risks.

The complication rate for myelogram is very low, but not zero. As with any procedure involving a needle, there is a rare chance of infection or bleeding at the injection site. Reaction to the contrast material used during the procedure is also rare (such as itching, sneezing or rash).

There is also a risk of headache developing after the procedure. This particular headache occurs when you are standing, and gets better when lying flat.

Lastly, there is always a small chance that the injection will be unsuccessful, particularly if there is severe arthritis or significant instrumentation.

How You Should Prepare

Arrange to bring someone with to drive you home; You should not drive for 2 hours. Have someone stay with you after procedure.

If you are on blood thinners, you will need to hold the medication prior to the procedure. Contact your healthcare provider before stopping any medication to determine if it is safe for you.

Additionally, we will call you doctor's office to review your current medication list. There are some other medications that will need to be stopped before the procedure.

If you have an infection or if you are on antibiotics, the medication course must be complete prior to the procedure, to ensure that no infection remains.

On the day of the procedure, wear comfortable clothes without metal fasteners, including zippers, buttons, and snaps.

What Happens During the Procedure

You will lie on an x-ray table on your stomach, and an x-ray camera will be positioned above you. Your lower back will be cleaned with an antiseptic solution, and a local anesthetic will be used in the skin to numb the area.

A thin needle will be then be guided into spinal canal. You may feel a brief pressure sensation or discomfort while contrast is injected into the spinal canal. After the injection, x-rays will be taken using the fluoroscopy machine.

In most cases, a CT will follow the myelogram, which will take another 30 minutes. It will be important to remain flat for about 60 minutes after the injection to lessen the risk of post-myelogram headache.

After the Procedure

You should have someone stay with you for 2 hours after the procedure. Lay flat in bed with your head slightly elevated, and rest for the remainder of the day. Do not return to work until the next day.

You may resume your normal diet and prescribed medications (resume blood thinner medication tomorrow). Try to drink extra fluids. Avoid heavy lifting or strenuous activity for 24 hours after the procedure.

If you develop a headache, drink more liquid than usual. Over the counter pain medications and caffeine may also be used. Do not drink alcohol. Rest and lie down. If the headache is not getting better, or if you develop other symptoms such as fever or stiff neck, call your doctor. Another procedure known as an epidural blood patch may help.

