

A myelogram is a diagnostic exam in which iodine contrast material is injected into the fluid space which surrounds the spinal cord and nerves. Images are taken using a real time form of x-ray called fluoroscopy. Plain x-rays of the spine only provide information about the bony structures. Placing contrast material into the spinal canal enables better visualization of its contents and can aid in the diagnosis of problems such as disc herniations, spinal stenosis and tumors.

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★ Locations offering myelogram

Getting a Myelogram

What you need to know



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What is a myelogram?

A myelogram is a diagnostic exam in which a contrast material is injected into space around the spinal cord in the spinal canal and images are taken using a real-time form of x-ray call fluoroscopy. Regular x-rays of the spine only give a clear picture of the bones. By placing a contrast agent into the spinal column and spaces around the spinal cord and nerves, these non-bony structures show up white on the fluoroscope, aiding the physician in diagnosis.

Getting ready

You will be given preparation instructions when you speak with your ARA scheduler. Please let the scheduler know about any medications you are taking and if you have any allergies, especially to iodinated contrast materials. Do not eat anything for six hours before your exam. You may have clear fluids to drink the morning of your examination. Before the myelogram, you will be asked to sign a consent form. You must have someone to drive you home, preferably in a vehicle in which you can recline.

What happens during a myelogram?

Before the exam, you will change into a gown and use the bathroom. You may be given medication that will help you relax. Be sure to remove any jewelry that may interfere with the x-ray.

The radiologist performing the examination and a technologist will be in the room with you for the entire procedure. The area where the injection will be made will be cleansed with antiseptic and covered with a sterile drape. You will be given an injection of local anesthetic, and with x-ray guidance, a needle will be placed into the spinal canal. Contrast will be injected and the needle will then be removed. Contrast can then be maneuvered with gravity to the area of interest by tilting the x-ray table. The radiologist will take individual x-rays for later review.

The entire procedure usually takes between 15 to 30 minutes. After the myelogram, you will have a CT scan while the contrast agent is still in your spinal canal. The CT takes about 5 minutes.

How it feels

You will feel a brief sting from the small needle used to administer the local anesthetic. You will then feel a slight pressure as another needle is inserted into your spinal canal. Please let the neuroradiologist know how you are feeling.

Some people have difficulty swallowing while lying on their stomachs with their chins extended. You may not enjoy having to lie still for so long or having the table tilted so that your feet are higher than your head. Please be reassured that these positions do not last very long.

Recuperating time

You will be allowed to go home after approximately two hours of observation. You must have someone drive you home where you should plan to stay for the remainder of the day. We recommend that you lie flat with your head slightly elevated for four to six hours. This is done to decrease the likelihood of developing the most frequent undesirable side effects of myelography, which are headache and nausea. We recommend that you drink plenty of fluids following the procedure.

Following your myelogram, you should avoid strenuous activity and heavy lifting for 48 hours and avoid bending over for 24 hours.

Finding out the results

The report of your myelogram will be sent to your physician by the end of the day of the exam. You should contact your doctor to receive the results of your exam. Additional studies or treatment may be recommended.

