

Care Gram

Blood Patch

What Is a Blood Patch?

A blood patch is a procedure that is done by an anesthesiologist or nurse anesthetist to treat a “spinal headache.” This type of headache sometimes develops after an epidural or spinal anesthesia. It may occur after any procedure or surgery that causes a leak of cerebral spinal fluid (CSF).

What Is a Spinal Headache?

A spinal headache is caused by a loss of CSF. If a needle hole punctures the outer membrane (typically a spinal needle or epidural needle), some of the spinal fluid can leak out of the brain. This causes the brain to sag, which stretches the nerves around the brain. This might produce a very bad headache.

Symptoms of a Spinal Headache

- It goes away when lying flat, but quickly comes back when sitting up or standing.
- It is a throbbing headache and sometimes causes nausea and light sensitivity.
- It is described as “feeling like your head is about to explode.”
- It may or may not be accompanied by a stiff neck.

Before and During the Blood Patch Procedure

- The anesthesiologist or nurse anesthetist will decide if you have a spinal headache. Before the blood patch is done, you must sign a consent form for the procedure.
- You will be asked to rate your pain before and after the procedure. We will use the scale of 0 to 10 - zero meaning no pain and a 10 rating as your worst pain.
- The nurse will help you into a sitting position and ask you to lean over a bedside stand. You will be asked to arch and push out your back.
- Blood will be drawn from your arm (about 15 cc or two-thirds of an ounce).
- The anesthesiologist or nurse anesthetist will clean an area of your back for the procedure. A sterile drape and antiseptic wash are then applied.
- A numbing medicine will be applied to your back. Once you are numb, you should only feel pressure.
- The anesthesiologist or nurse anesthetist inserts a thin needle into your back and identifies the correct area for injection.
- The blood that was drawn is injected into your back. You may feel more pressure in your back and neck at this time. The needle is then withdrawn.



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After the Procedure

- You will be asked to lay down flat on your back for about 1 hour, slowly raising your head a little higher every 10 minutes or so until sitting up.
- The goal is to have your headache gone or at least reduced at the end of this time, but it may take 24 to 48 hours for full relief.
- Low back pain and/or soreness could last a few days.
- The doctor or nurse will give you follow-up instructions and will let you know if there are any restrictions to your activity.