# OSCE checklist for lumbar puncture

An OSCE checklist for lumbar puncture covers why the test is needed, consent, safety checks, positioning, the procedure and the aftercare. This is our own practice list.

## The checklist, step by step

1. Wash your hands, introduce yourself, confirm identity and explain why the test is needed.
2. Explain what will happen in plain words, and the risks. Gain consent.
3. Check for reasons not to go ahead: signs of raised pressure in the head, bleeding problems, blood thinners, allergy to local anaesthetic, and infection in the skin of the back. Say that you would get a scan first if there are signs of raised pressure.
4. Check the equipment and have an assistant ready. Measure blood glucose just before the procedure.
5. Position the patient on their side with the knees up, or sitting forward.
6. Find the level in the lower back using the landmarks you were taught.
7. Clean the skin, drape the area and use an aseptic technique.
8. Give local anaesthetic.
9. Insert the needle, measure the opening pressure if needed, then collect the samples in order.
10. Remove the needle, cover the site, and label the samples.
11. Tell the patient to lie flat for a while as the local policy says, and to report headache, back pain or leg symptoms.
12. Send the samples and record the procedure.

## What candidates commonly forget

- Checking for reasons not to do it.
- Aseptic technique.
- Labelling the samples in order.

- Aftercare advice.
- Measuring a paired blood glucose just before the procedure.

## How to use this list

This is our own practice checklist. Exam bodies mark in their own way. Use it to build a routine, then say each step aloud as you do it. You can also practise with an AI patient on this site, and try one station free with no sign-up. For a general station frame, see the general OSCE checklist.

## Common questions

### Why check before a lumbar puncture?

Some patients should not have one until a scan or other checks. NICE publishes guidance on bacterial meningitis, one of the conditions a lumbar puncture is used for.

### What does the NHS say about after a lumbar puncture?

The NHS says patients are watched for a short time, lie flat, and should seek advice if a headache does not settle.

### Is this a marking sheet?

No. It is our own list for practice.

## Sources


- NICE: Meningitis (bacterial) and meningococcal disease (NG240)
- NHS: Lumbar puncture
- WHO: Hand hygiene


Checked 2026-11-13. Fees and rules change, so confirm them with the regulator before you book.