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Myelography and Spinal Radiography

- Myelography is a positive contrast study of the spinal canal that allows us to infer size and shape of the spinal canal and cord. It allows us to visualize disk silhouettes and their possible deviations, spinal cord compressions and tumors. It is useful as confirmation or elimination of diagnoses.
- The spinal cord is encased in the vertebrae (bones of the spine), in the spinal canal. It is further surrounded by a thin layer of watery fluid called cerebrospinal fluid (CSF). This fluid also surrounds the brain.
- Since CSF and tissue are equally invisible on plain x-ray, myelography allows information about these structures to be gathered..
- The contrast dye called Iohexol contains iodine, which like the calcium of bone is able to stop x-ray radiation, providing an image.
- Under general anesthesia, an area over the spine is clipped and disinfected. A sterile needle is carefully inserted into the small space containing the cerebrospinal fluid surrounding the spinal cord, generally at the base of the skull or in the lower spine. If spinal fluid leaks out, a sample is collected for testing and this fluid confirms correct needle placement. This almost always occurs at the base of the skull, rarely in the lower spine.
- If no CSF leaks out, a small injection of Iohexol is injected and an x-ray is immediately taken to confirm accurate placement.
- When confirmed, the calculated dose of the Iohexol is injected slowly. Since the dye is replacing the CSF and is changing the pressure in the spinal space, and around the brain, the patient is carefully monitored. If there are rare complications with the procedure, the injection is stopped and appropriate actions taken.
- At the completion of the Iohexol injection, the needle is removed and multiple x-rays of the spine are taken. The dye is rapidly absorbed from the spinal space into the bloodstream and then eliminated from the body.
- The x-rays outline the spinal canal, the disks & any protruded/extruded disk material, the spinal cord, and any possible tumors.
- With the appropriate diagnosis the patient may go immediately to surgery.
- Myelography can induce seizures. This risk declines as the dye is absorbed and eliminated. All patients are closely monitored for seizures. If they occur, which is uncommon, anti-convulsant medication will be given to stop the seizures.
- The doctor will show you the x-rays and discuss the findings and treatment plan.
- You are always welcome to ask questions.
- The cost for a myelogram is \$500-700. [Feb 2011]