

I'm currently doing it from Philadelphia.

Well, it was brought up to me as part of my healthcare team and everything, and I realized that I was a good candidate, a good fit for the research study. That motivated me to look into it further and see if there were any questions that I still had. But overall, because I trust my healthcare team, and once I got introduced to the people involved in the study, I felt like it was a pretty safe environment to join and proceed with the study.

I think my only worry initially was I guess just the lumbar puncture and the potential side effects that I would be feeling afterwards. But I discussed that a lot with the team and with a lot of people that were interacting with me, and I felt pretty confident by the time that the procedure came up. For other stuff that I was worried about, I feel like in similar situations where I've had to get up really early for these things, I felt like they were pretty flexible, which was nice for me because I value my sleep. And I feel like everything else—I was lucky that I had someone with me to drive me to the procedures and make sure I came back home and everything was okay. And I was lucky that I had somewhere I could stay by nearby instead of having to take a long car ride back to where I was. So I think it was pretty nice. I feel like everything went smooth, and that's because I had a good support team and everything. But ... I feel like I wasn't too worried about everything like once I heard more details about what was involved and what was expected of me.

I think the main questions that I remember asking was like "How big is the needle?" I didn't see it actually, but they told me it's very small, very thin, and I feel like it really didn't even register with me when it was in my back and everything. I guess also, about the spinal fluid and everything that they would be extracting, it was good to know, that that's regularly replaced. And that was another thing, too, is that it really didn't feel that invasive, having that removed because it's replenished very quickly and easily. They did tell me that some potential stuff might be like headaches or just stuff like that, but it wasn't as severe as I thought. I think right after, I made sure, and I always do in general, make sure to hydrate. And I found one thing that worked really well for me was coconut water because it has like the electrolytes and all that, and I enjoy drinking it anyways, even outside of when I need to replenish that stuff. So I felt like I was pretty ... I set myself up pretty well to not feel too many severe symptoms or anything. I feel like I was able to recover pretty quickly, like within that week, within the weekdays. And I feel like just a couple of days later, I was back to normal. I know for everyone it kind of differs, but I think the best .. the thing that you can do to prepare for anyone is just to hydrate and to make sure that also maybe that you'd like eaten and that you have enough energy in you and everything. And also to have a good support team to kind of get you to places and everything.

I think the MRI was actually not as bad as I thought it was going to be. I feel like, with my past experiences with MRIs, I feel like they can be either very long and you can be very tired in them. But luckily, the MRI technician that I had was very nice, and I feel like everyone that was involved with that part of the process was very nice getting me comfortable and everything. And I think I was lucky that I've been in the MRI before, so I know what to expect. I feel like that was something that I was thinking about, but really in the moment, it ended up not being like that bad. I feel like I was able to rest a little bit or close my eyes if I needed to. Other than that ... other parts ... I guess just like the 24 hours after the lumbar puncture, I was expecting just to be like out of commission, but I really wasn't. I feel like I was still able to do a lot. And I think it was good that I had other people with me to make sure I was doing well and just help me if I wanted to get some food or if I wanted to do other things. I think it was really nice hearing doctor's orders to relax, like, "Just lay flat, relax." And it's like You don't even need to tell me to do that; I'll do that anyways. But I think was ... it just ended up being a lot easier and a lot less invasive than I thought it was going to be.

I think for my situation it's good because I'll be in the general area where I'm interacting with the study, so there is a good travel system. I'm able to get back and forth between the study and my house pretty easily. I mean also, even if you can't, I've heard that you can get reimbursed for travel expenses and all that; so that's a nice perk, too. But ... I think that ... in general, participating in these research studies and stuff related to this, it's good knowing that I have something that I can offer to other people that might benefit from me participating. Hearing that I'd be a good fit or that I'm a good candidate kind of motivates me. And then also, the reimbursement and the payment and everything—that's also good for me at this point in my life. But ... other than that, I feel like it was nice interacting with the staff members involved, and I felt like overall it was a pretty good experience.

I think I might have mentioned it to my therapist and just told them kind of just my thoughts before going in. I feel like, really, everyone that I talked to was pretty supportive about it, and I felt like I had enough information from everyone else that I was able to relay what was expected of me and kind of run down what exactly they were looking for. So I felt like it seemed pretty good after talking to people. Especially after my parents learned more about what was involved, especially with the lumbar puncture, and once we were able to come to an agreement that this was okay, I feel like everything went pretty smoothly after that. But ... I feel like at the end of the day, it's up to the participant, at least in my opinion. I feel like I'm glad that I did ask and that I did bring it up with other people because it is good to get some other opinions and some feedback on that. But I feel like I was pretty motivated to participate either way, however I could, so I am pretty glad that I did in the end.

That day was nice. I mean, the weather was nice, and it was in a good part of the day that I wasn't tired or anything. I remember the blood work and everything before, and that went smooth. I've had experience with that, so I feel like that was easy to go through. Then the MRI—that was also nice, that was easy. And then the lumbar puncture—I remember meeting the doctor, the neurologist involved, and he was nice. I think what I did kind of to help myself was just look at some happy things. I went on social media quickly to look at some dog and cat videos, and pet videos and stuff. And then I also listened to some music, but I also made sure I could hear the neurologists and everyone else. I just listened to some music just to kind of get me kind of calm and everything. Really, the lumbar puncture itself, I feel like just after the numbing the area .. after numbing the area, it was kind of hard for me to tell what part was the lumbar puncture and what was stuff before, like making the incision and everything or making the point where it would go in. And I feel like, none of it was as bad as I thought. As it went through and everything, I felt myself kind of more relieved that, "Oh, this isn't as bad as I thought, and I'm actually doing it now. Like, this is the hard part and I'm almost through it." But .. I feel like, that day itself was pretty nice, and especially the room—the view that the room had was nice. I took a picture of that, and that was good. Everyone involved that day was really nice, and understanding, and patient. Right after the lumbar puncture, I laid down for a bit and I just was on my phone for a little bit just to make sure I was still engaged with something. It was a lot smoother of a process than I had imagined and everything, and I was really happy with how things turned out.

Really, as long as you have all the information you need, then it's really up to you to make that decision. But I would really say that if something seems like it's going to be too hard for you, there is people that will help you go through it and go through it step by step and make it a lot easier than if you think it's going to be very difficult for you. There is a lot of accommodations, I feel like. I definitely would recommend it from my personal experience, yes.

It makes me feel good to participate in this because if there's something I can offer to someone who is not as fortunate as me or just is not in a situation that they can really deal with, then if my results can help them push through that or just make some developments in that area, then that's honestly a really great contribution that really doesn't take a lot from me, especially for something that replenishes constantly. It really seems like a very ... a reward for being able to do that alongside the payment and everything. I feel like its ... it feels very beneficial to me and to everyone else who is affected by these results and everything. I just hope that a lot of these research studies are able to continue, and get what they need and the resources that they need, and still be able to help people in a lot of

different situations. I think that's what makes me feel good about being involved in this, alongside the people that I get to meet through this and interact with. Hearing some of the results of my own—seeing stuff that .. to get some of these results outside of a research study would be a little bit tricky or maybe costly, and to be able to get these results and information about yourself, too, is something that I'm really happy to be able to have and reference. I feel like I've had a very good experience with this, and I'm glad that I finally made the decision to go through with it.

What gives me hope for mental health research is the fact that there are other people who are experiencing similar things or are able to participate and help. There's a lot of different backgrounds and a lot of different things that everyone has to provide or that they can benefit from being involved or results they can give. And I think the wider diversity that you have of people coming in, hopefully, the better the results will be or the more progress that will be made through it.