

Patient Information Leaflet

Abdominal Drain Procedure (Paracentesis)

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Aim of leaflet

This leaflet tells you about having an abdominal drain procedure (paracentesis). It explains what is involved and what the possible risks are. It is not meant to replace informed discussion between you and your healthcare provider, but can act as a starting point for such discussions. If you have any further questions about the procedure please ask the doctor or nurse who has referred you or is going to perform it.



What is Ascites?

Ascites is the medical term used to describe the fluid within the abdomen (tummy). In a healthy person there is normally a very small amount of fluid within the abdominal cavity, which is being continuously created and absorbed. However, certain illnesses can cause an imbalance and cause the fluid to build up within the abdominal cavity. There are a number of causes but the most common is chronic liver disease (cirrhosis).

What are the symptoms of ascites?

As the ascites builds up in the abdomen it will become more swollen (distended). The most common symptoms are abdominal discomfort or pain and shortness of breath. Other symptoms that you may experience include indigestion, poor appetite, nausea, reduced mobility and tiredness.

What can be done about it?

To improve your symptoms we need to remove the fluid and stop it from building up again.

The most important thing you must do when you have developed ascites related to liver disease is to adopt a low salt diet. We recommend that you do not add salt to food or cooking and avoid processed foods, which normally come in cans, packets and jars.

Fluid can be removed using water tablets (diuretics). The most common drugs used are called Spironolactone and Furosemide. The doctor or nurse will increase the dose whilst monitoring your blood tests as these medications can upset the balance of electrolytes and your kidney function.



If you have a lot of ascites and have symptoms that are troubling you, the quickest way to remove the fluid is to drain the fluid using a plastic drainage tube inserted into the abdomen. This procedure is called paracentesis.

How will the paracentesis (drain) be done?

The procedure will be performed by a Nurse / Doctor. They will consent you for the procedure and explain the potential complications.

You will need to have blood tests before the procedure and have a cannula put in to your vein. This is to enable us to give you human albumin solution (a body protein) replacement (if needed).

Before the procedure the Nurse / Doctor will examine your abdomen to find the best insertion site. The insertion site will then be cleaned with special skin cleaning fluid and then numbed with local anaesthetic; after this point you should not feel anything sharp.

The drain, a thin plastic tube, is then inserted into the abdomen to drain the fluid that has collected into a bag. The drain will normally be left in for up to 6 hours, but may be removed earlier. During the procedure we will measure and empty the fluid drained and your observations (temperature, pulse and blood pressure) will be monitored. When the drain is removed a dressing will be put over the tiny hole and should be kept in place for 48 hours. If possible, you should try to remain on your side with the drain side uppermost for 30 minutes after the drain is removed.



What are the risks of the procedure?

Paracentesis is a safe procedure, but like any procedure there is a possibility of complications or side effects.

The main side effect is tiredness after the procedure and some may experience abdominal discomfort.

During the procedure there is a very occasional risk of causing bleeding and a very rare risk of causing damage to one of the organs in the abdomen (liver, spleen, bowel).

After the procedure you may experience some leakage of fluid at the drain site. If this continues for over 24 hours from the drain removal, please contact us immediately. You may require a small stitch to stop the site from leaking further.

Very rarely you may develop infection at the site of insertion or in the abdomen. Let us know if you feel feverish, unwell or notice any redness, swelling or pain around the site.

Who should I contact if I become unwell after?

If you develop a complication from the procedure please contact 01752 - 431320 / 432721 / 433174 (9-5pm). Outside of these times please either contact your GP (out of hours 111) or attend the Emergency Department.

Do I have to stay in hospital overnight?

If you are having the procedure as an outpatient we would hope to get you home the same day. Occasionally we do need to keep you in overnight and we will keep you informed about this.





This leaflet is available in large print and other formats and languages.

Contact: Administrator

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