

Gastroenterology

Abdominal drain procedure or drainage of ascites (Paracentesis)

This leaflet provides information about the procedure recommended to relieve the symptoms of fluid build-up in the abdomen.

What is ascites

This is the medical term used to describe the build-up of fluid in the abdomen (tummy). In health it is normal to have a small amount of fluid within the abdomen, which is continuously produced and then absorbed. However, in certain illnesses, there is an imbalance, and this causes fluid to build up. Ascites is commonly associated with conditions such as liver disease, heart disease and kidney disease.

What are the symptoms of Ascites?

When fluid builds up, the abdomen may become swollen, leading to discomfort or pain. Other symptoms can include feeling sick (nausea), difficulty breathing, indigestion, not feeling hungry or feeling full all the time. It may also restrict your ability to move normally.

What can be done about this?

Symptoms can be improved by removing or reducing this extra fluid. This is often done using medications such as Spironolactone or other water tablets (diuretics). However, sometimes these medicines don't work or can take too long to work and can have side effects. A faster way to remove fluid is by inserting a plastic drain (tube) into the abdomen temporarily to allow fluid to drain out like a tap. This procedure is called paracentesis.



Patient Information

What does paracentesis involve?

We carry out this procedure for you either as an in-patient or as a day-case on the Gastroenterology Ward (Ward 32). The decision on which option is best for you will be made after assessment and discussion.

- You should plan to be at the hospital for the day, although the duration of draining process is only around 6 hours.
- If you are taking 'blood thinners' or medications that affect platelet cells in the blood stream such as Warfarin, Apixaban or Clopidogrel, you should have been given individual advice on when to stop these before the procedure.
- You will be seen by a doctor or clinical specialist nurse. You will be clinically examined to confirm the need to go ahead. Occasionally, if we are unsure about the presence of fluid we will perform an ultrasound.
- If this condition or another condition you have has affected your platelet function or clotting levels, we sometimes have to give you some platelets or clotting products either just before or during the procedure to make it safer.
- We will talk through the procedure, answer any questions you have and will ask you to sign a consent form, if you are happy.

Procedure steps:

- You will be asked to lie down on a bed or trolley.
- Your observations will be taken (blood pressure, pulse, oxygen levels and temperature).
- A plastic tube (intravenous cannula) will be inserted into your vein so that we can replace one of the body's proteins called albumin.
- Your abdomen will be cleaned, and a local anaesthetic will be injected into the skin before the drain is inserted.
- The drain will stay in place for up to 6 hours, before it is removed.
- When the drain is removed, a dressing will be applied for 48 hours. This should be kept dry as much as possible.
- Sometimes, a small bag can be placed over the hole to stop your abdomen and clothes from getting wet. We will show you how to empty this bag and provide you with some small dressing to take home with you.

Patient Information

During the procedure

- For your safety, you will need to remain on the bed or trolley, but you will be able to sit up.
- You can receive painkillers during the procedure if you find it painful.
- We advise you to bring some reading material, such as a book or magazine with you to make your stay more pleasurable.
- Once the drain is removed and your observations are fine, then you will be able to go home.

What are the risks?

As with any procedure there is the possibility of complications or side effects. Paracentesis is usually a safe procedure, with a very small rate of significant side effects:

- **Anaesthetic:** The injection of local anaesthetic may cause a temporary stinging sensation.
- **Tiredness:** It is common to feel tired after the procedure.
- **Infection:** There is a risk of infection in the fluid at a later date. This could cause increased temperature (feeling of fever). We do check for existing infection by sending some fluid to the laboratory at the time of the procedure.
- **Bleeding:** There is a small risk of puncturing a blood vessel, which could lead to low blood pressure and light-headedness. About 1% of patients may develop a small abdominal haematoma (a small collection of blood), which is not serious, and less than 1 in 1000 people have significant bleeding.
- **Organ damage:** Although rare (less than 1 in 1000 cases), there is a risk of damaging internal organs such as the liver, spleen, or intestines.

Can you drive afterwards?

You should not drive, do vigorous exercise or operate heavy machinery on the day of the procedure. You may feel very tired and sometimes a little dizzy, which could affect your concentration.

Patient Information

After going home

Emergency Contact: If you experience severe abdominal pain, signs of bleeding, feel feverish, or feel faint, call the Gastroenterology Ward (Ward 32) immediately at 024 7696 7833 or 024 7696 7831. Alternatively, go to A&E if you cannot reach us.

Fluid leakage: You may experience some leakage of fluid for up to 72 hours after the procedure. If leakage continues beyond this period, contact us using the numbers above if out of hours. For Monday to Friday, 08:30-4:30pm, call 024 7696 7123 to speak with one of our Specialist Hepatology nurses.

Further procedures: We usually try to organise further procedures for when we think you need them. To monitor for further fluid build-up, weigh yourself regularly. If you notice significant changes before your next scheduled procedure, contact your consultant's secretary or call our hepatology nurse at 024 7696 7123.

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this Information in another language or format, then please contact us on 024 7696 7123 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy.

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We would like you to tell us what you think about our services. This helps us make further improvements and recognise members of staff who provide a good service.

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Document History

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