

Patient information

Drainage of Abdominal Fluid (Ascites)

Digestive Diseases Care Group

Paracentesis or abdominal drain

This leaflet will explain your abdominal drain procedure, we call this paracentesis. This leaflet will explain this in more detail including the risks and benefits and what to expect when you come to our day unit.

If this leaflet has not answered all your queries please speak to the nurse or doctor caring for you.

What is ascites?

Ascites is the medical term used to describe the build-up of fluid within the abdomen. It is normal for the peritoneum (the lining found inside the abdominal cavity) to produce a small amount of fluid which is constantly reabsorbed. It allows the abdominal organs to move against each other. However, sometimes more fluid is made than reabsorbed. This causes an excessive amount of fluid to build up. This is most commonly seen in chronic liver disease but can happen in other conditions.

What symptoms can ascites cause?

The presence of ascites can cause swelling of the tummy, discomfort, poor appetite, indigestion, sickness, shortness of breath and reduced mobility. It can also make you feel tired and can occasionally get infected.

How is ascites treated?

To relieve any symptoms the excess fluid has to be removed. Usually this can be done by taking medication called diuretics, the most commonly used ones are spironolactone and furosemide.

However it is not always possible because the medication stops working or because of the side effects they cause such as kidney problems. They may also take a few weeks to work.

The other option is to place a small tube into the abdominal cavity to remove the fluid. This procedure is known as an abdominal drain or paracentesis.

Are there any other alternative treatments/ procedures?

If we are unable to treat your ascites with diuretics a paracentesis drain is the next option. Any further treatment will be discussed with you by your consultant or specialist nurse.

What will happen if I decide not to have treatment?

If you decide not to have this treatment any symptoms you have may be difficult to relieve and may result in other complications. Any further treatment options will be discussed with you by your consultant or specialist nurse.

What sort of anaesthetic will be given to me?

You will be given a local anaesthetic.

Local anaesthetic is drug-induced numbness: it may be provided by an anaesthetist, surgeon or other healthcare professional, depending on the technique used. Like all medicines, local anaesthetics may sometimes cause side effects, as well as the effects that are needed. You may experience dizziness, blurred vision, drowsiness and occasionally loss of consciousness.

Serious side effects are rare, and include fits, low blood pressure, slowed breathing and changes in heartbeat, which may be life-threatening. If you have any concerns about any of these effects, you should discuss them with your doctor

What does paracentesis involve?

We carry out paracentesis on our day unit on ward 5Y. Please arrive by 9 am. Before the procedure you will need a blood test to ensure it is safe to go ahead. You will be seen by the clinician who is performing your procedure who will ask you a few questions and answer any questions you may have.

When you arrive on the day unit a nurse will weigh you and carry out a check of your blood pressure, pulse and oxygen levels.

We will also place a cannula (tube) in your arm to administer replacement fluids throughout the day.

You will be asked to lie on a bed to insert the drain. The nurse or doctor will examine you, and use an ultrasound machine to assess the amount of fluid in the abdomen and to locate the areas within the abdominal cavity where the drain can be inserted safely.

Before inserting the drain the nurse or doctor will clean the area. A small amount of local anaesthetic will be injected into the insertion site. This may sting a little but will quickly numb the site.

Once the local anaesthetic is working, the drain will be inserted. It will then be secured with a dressing and attached to a drainage bag. It will remain in place for a maximum of six hours. Please take care whilst changing position or getting out of bed to ensure that the drain does not slip out.

Fluids will be given via the drip (cannula) once the drain is in place.

You will have regular checks of your blood pressure, pulse and oxygen levels to assess for any potential complications. The drainage bag will be emptied at regular intervals and the levels of fluid recorded.

Sometimes it may be difficult to insert the drain on the Day Unit and you will need to be referred to our Radiology Department to carry out the procedure. You will return to the day unit to be cared for following the procedure.

There is a possibility that the fluid will re-accumulate and further drains will be necessary.

How long will I be on the day unit?

Most patients will attend the day unit from 9 am and be able to go home late afternoon or early evening providing they are well and there have been no complications.

Are there any complications or side effects from paracentesis?

Risks associated with paracentesis are rare. It is a safe procedure.

The common side effects are:

- Feeling tired
- Increased pain in your abdomen
- Leakage of fluid from the drain site. **If leakage continues after 48 hours after removal of the drain please contact the day unit for advice.** We may need to insert a small stitch to stop any further fluid leaking.
- Local infection at the drain site. **Please contact the day unit if you develop a high temperature or notice any redness, swelling or pain around the drain site.**

The more serious complications can include the following however they occur in less than 1 in 100 patients:

- Infection in your abdomen (this can cause abdominal pain, make your temperature rise and cause sweating, fever and shivering)
- Puncturing a blood vessel which can result in bleeding, which could be potentially life threatening.
- Damage to abdominal organs (e.g. liver, spleen, intestines) can occur. This is a very serious complication of the procedure but occurs in less than 6:100 cases.
- Sometimes the drain gets blocked, so you may be asked to change position. On some occasions the drain may have to be changed.

If serious complications occur you will be admitted to hospital

Feedback

Your feedback is important to us and helps us influence care in the future.

Following your discharge from hospital or attendance at your outpatient appointment you will receive a text asking if you would recommend our service to others. Please take the time to text back, you will not be charged for the text and can opt out at any point. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

Further information

5Y Day Unit

Tel: 0151 706 3850

Text phone number: 18001 0151 706 3850

If you need urgent advice in the evening or at the weekend please call switchboard on and ask to speak to the Gastro Registrar on-call

Tel: 0151 706 2000

Text phone number: 18001 0151 706 2000

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Review date: September 2024

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