

# Paracentesis

Your operation explained

**Patient Information**

## **Introduction**

This booklet is designed to give you information about having paracentesis and the care you will receive before, during and after the procedure. We hope it will answer some of the questions that you or those who care for you may have at this time. It is not meant to replace the discussion between you and your surgeon but helps you understand more about what is discussed.

## **What is paracentesis (abdominal tap)?**

Paracentesis or abdominal tap, is a procedure in which a small tube is inserted through your abdominal wall to remove fluid from within your abdomen.

Inside the abdomen is a membrane called the peritoneum. The peritoneum covers the organs inside your abdomen and produces a fluid which lubricates these organs and helps them to glide smoothly over one another. Sometimes too much of this fluid can be produced causing discomfort. This is known as ascites.

## **Why do I need to have paracentesis done?**

There are two reasons for having this procedure:

- To relieve pressure from within your abdomen from a build up of fluid called ascites.
- To remove a small amount of fluid to send to the laboratory to be tested. You can expect to have the results of this test within a week.

## **What causes the build up of fluid?**

There are several possible reasons for this build up of fluid:

- If cancer cells have spread to the lining of the abdomen they can cause irritation, leading to the build up of fluid.
- If the liver is affected by cancer it can cause a blockage in the blood circulating through it, leading to a build up of fluid in the abdomen. Alternatively liver damage can change the body's fluid balance, causing fluids to build up in the body's tissues, including the abdomen.
- Cancer can also affect the lymphatic system. This is made up of

the tissues and organs that produce and store lymph, as well as the network of vessels carrying lymph fluid throughout the body.

### **What are the symptoms of fluid build up?**

The symptoms of this build up of fluid include:

- Swelling of the abdomen, with associated pain or discomfort.
- Difficulty in moving or sitting comfortably.
- Breathlessness.
- Tiredness.
- Nausea and vomiting.
- Indigestion.
- Reduced appetite.
- Altered bowel habit.

### **Will I have any tests before the procedure begins?**

Your abdomen will be examined to determine the site for the paracentesis tube to be inserted. Sometimes you will have an ultrasound scan to locate the area where the fluid has collected and a mark will be made on your skin where the paracentesis tube will be inserted.

Ultrasound examination uses high frequency sound waves which are transmitted through the skin. This is used to form a picture of the inside of your abdomen (tummy) on a television screen.

Gel is placed on your abdomen and a small hand-held scanner moved across your skin. If you need to have this procedure you will find that it is painless.

A blood test may be taken to check that your blood clots normally before the procedure is performed.

### **What happens during the procedure?**

If you are coming into the hospital as an inpatient you will be admitted to a ward within the hospital you are attending.

Before the procedure begins you will be asked to empty your bladder.

A nurse will help you onto the examination couch or bed and make sure you are in a comfortable position. A doctor or nurse will give you a local anaesthetic (an injection to numb the skin). During the procedure, a small tube will be inserted into your abdomen and is sometimes secured by stitches. The fluid (ascites) will drain through this tube into a drainage bag. You will be able to move around whilst the fluid is being drained into the drainage bag.

When all the fluid has drained, the tube is removed and a dressing is applied over the drainage site. The drainage could take place over several hours, overnight, or could last up to 48 hours. However, if the procedure is being done as an outpatient, it should take two hours at the most and you will be able to go home on the same day.

You may experience slight discomfort during the procedure, but it should not be painful. Painkillers can be given if you experience any discomfort, inform the nursing staff if this occurs.

Sometimes after the drainage has taken place another build up of fluid can occur. If this happens then paracentesis can be repeated.

### **What are the benefits of paracentesis?**

Having the fluid drained from your abdomen will relieve discomfort. The results of the test will help determine why the fluid is present.

### **What are the risks associated with paracentesis?**

If a large quantity of fluid is removed, there is a slight risk of lowered blood pressure. Your blood pressure, pulse and temperature will be monitored regularly during your stay in hospital.

The tube draining fluid can become blocked. If this happens you may be asked to move around, as this can sometimes clear the blockage. If this does not work then the tube might have to be removed and another one put in.

The site of the drain can become infected. We will take your temperature to check for infection, if this does occur then it can be treated.

There is a very small risk that your bowel might be punctured during

the procedure. This is unlikely but may cause bleeding or infection and could require an operation.

**Are there any alternatives to paracentesis?**

Some patients may benefit from a medication known as a diuretic, which will make you urinate more frequently than normal. This treatment is only suitable for certain patients and in these circumstances it may slow the build up of fluid in the abdomen.

In some cases you might have a permanent drain, called a peritoneo-venous shunt, put into your body. This is designed to drain fluid directly from your abdomen into a vein. This procedure involves a general anaesthetic, and several days stay in hospital. If this is an option for you, your hospital doctor will discuss it with you further.

If you have any questions you would like to ask, please contact your Gynaecology Nurse Specialist.

**It is important that you make a list of all medicines you are taking and bring it with you to all your follow-up clinic appointments. If you have any questions at all, please ask your surgeon, oncologist or nurse. It may help to write down questions as you think of them so that you have them ready. It may also help to bring someone with you when you attend your outpatients appointments.**

**Glossary of medical terms used in this information:**

**Ascites:** an accumulation of fluid in the spaces between tissues and organs in the cavity of the abdomen.

**Lymph:** an almost clear fluid which bathes body tissues and is found in lymphatic vessels and nodes.

**Peritoneum:** a smooth membrane which lines the cavity of the abdomen.

**Ultrasound scan:** ultrasound examination uses high frequency sound waves, which are transmitted through the skin. This is used to form a picture of the inside of your abdomen (tummy). Gel is placed

on your abdomen and a small hand-held scanner moved across your skin. This is a painless procedure which transmits pictures onto a television screen. The examination takes about 10 to 15 minutes. Detailed instructions will be sent with your appointment letter.

**Local sources of further information**

You can visit any of the health/cancer information centres listed below:

**Birmingham Women's NHS Foundation Trust**

Health Information Centre  
Birmingham Women's Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust  
Metchley Park Road  
Edgbaston  
Birmingham B15 2TG  
Telephone: 0121 627 2608

**Heart of England NHS Foundation Trust**

Health Information Centre  
Birmingham Heartlands Hospital  
Bordesley Green  
Birmingham B9 5SS  
Telephone: 0121 424 2280

Cancer Information and Support Centre  
Good Hope Hospital  
Rectory Road  
Sutton Coldfield B75 7RR  
Telephone: 0121 424 9486

**Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust**

The Courtyard Centre  
Sandwell General Hospital (Main Reception)  
Lyndon  
West Bromwich B71 4HJ  
Telephone: 0121 507 3792  
Fax: 0121 507 3816

**University Hospital Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust**

The Patrick Room

Cancer Centre  
Queen Elizabeth Hospital  
Edgbaston  
Birmingham B15 2TH  
Telephone: 0121 697 8417

**Walsall Primary Care Trust**  
Cancer Information & Support Services  
Challenge Building  
Hatherton Street  
Walsall WS1 1YB  
Freephone: 0800 783 9050

### **About this information**

This guide is provided for general information only and is not a substitute for professional medical advice. Every effort is taken to ensure that this information is accurate and consistent with current knowledge and practice at the time of publication. We are constantly striving to improve the quality of our information. If you have a suggestion about how this information can be improved, please contact us via our website: <http://www.birminghamcancer.nhs.uk>.

This information was produced by Pan Birmingham Cancer Network and was written by Consultant Surgeons, Clinical Nurse Specialists, Allied Health Professionals, Patients and Carers from the following Trusts:

Heart of England NHS Foundation Trust  
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