

Liver unit – 10th floor QEQM building, St Mary's Hospital

Draining excess fluid: abdominal paracentesis

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Introduction

Abdominal paracentesis is a procedure in which a drain is inserted into the abdomen to remove a build-up of fluid (ascites). It is offered as a day-case procedure in the Liver unit at St Mary's Hospital. This leaflet explains what the procedure entails and why it is performed.

What is ascites? (say 'uh-SY-teez')

Ascites is a build-up of fluid within the abdomen. It is commonly seen in patients with advanced liver disease. It occurs when more fluid is produced than is reabsorbed.

What are the symptoms of ascites?

As excess fluid builds in the abdominal cavity, you may have the following symptoms:

- swelling or bloating of the abdomen
- pain
- feeling sick (nausea)
- Indigestion
- poor appetite
- reduced mobility
- difficulty breathing

What is abdominal paracentesis, and why do I need it?

A drain is inserted into the abdomen to remove excess fluid (ascites). The medical name for this procedure is abdominal paracentesis. Your doctor has referred you for this procedure. This is often because we cannot remove the excess liquid with water tablets (diuretics) alone. So, putting in a drain should relieve you of the symptoms of having ascites.

What are the risks of paracentesis and how do you reduce them?

Paracentesis is a safe procedure. It is often performed in hospitals. But some rare but serious complications can occur. These include:

- infection
- bleeding
- causing a tear or perforation of the internal organs
- low blood pressure
- kidney problems.

These occur at a rate of less than 1 in 1000 procedures.

To reduce the risks of complications, we:

- use a sterile field by ensuring all the equipment is sterile
- use an ultrasound scanner. This helps us avoid any internal organs or blood vessels
- give replacement protein-rich fluid. This prevents the risks of low blood pressure and kidney problems

What do I need to do before coming for my abdominal paracentesis?

You can eat and drink as normal before the procedure.

You may be asked to stop some medications. We will give you clear instructions on what to do. So, please tell the liver day unit team if you are taking the following medications.

- water tablets (diuretics). For example, spironolactone, furosemide, bumetanide, amiloride. Usually, we will ask you to avoid these on the morning of the procedure
- blood thinning medications. For example, aspirin and clopidogrel. And anti-coagulants like warfarin, apixaban, rivaroxaban, and heparin. You may be asked to stop taking these a few days before your procedure. It is important to tell the liver unit team about blood-thinners

You may need to attend the unit for blood tests a few days before your procedure.

Our liver doctors may perform the procedure on level 10 of the Liver Unit. Or our interventional radiologists will perform it on level 3. The doctor will make the decision, and the nurse will update you and explain it to you when the date for the drainage is booked.

What happens on the day of my paracentesis?

1. When you arrive at the unit, the receptionist will greet and admit you. The nurse will escort you to a bed.
2. They will take your weight and vital signs. They will insert a small flexible tube (cannula) into your arm. This lets us give you fluids and medications.
3. The doctor will explain the risks and benefits of this procedure, and you will sign a consent form.
4. You will be asked to lie flat on the bed.
5. The doctor will use an ultrasound machine to find a safe place to insert the drain. The area will then be cleaned, and a sterile field will be placed on the abdomen.
6. To reduce the risks of pain, a local anesthetic injection will be applied to the area. This can sting at first but should settle quickly.
7. Next, the drain will be inserted. It will be secured with dressings and attached to a drainage bag. Samples of ascitic fluid may be sent for analysis.
8. For every two litres of ascitic fluid drained, you will be given protein-rich fluid replacement into a drip in your vein via the cannula. This reduces your risks of developing low blood pressure and kidney problems.

How long does the procedure take?

It usually takes 15 to 20 minutes to insert an abdominal paracentesis. Then the fluid is usually allowed to drain for six hours. Or the doctor might set a target for the number of litres to be drained. They will agree this before the drain is inserted.

The specialist hepatology nurses on level 10 will monitor you regularly. If your drain was inserted by the interventional radiologist on level 3, the nurses will transfer you to level 10 where you will stay until discharge

How long will I be in the liver unit?

Once drainage is complete, the nursing team will remove the drain. The doctor will review you before discharge if needed.

You will have 30 minutes bedrest and then a lying blood pressure will be taken. The nurse will then take your blood pressure standing at 1 minute and 3 minutes. If all the observations are acceptable, you will be discharged and allowed to go home.

In rare cases, a small amount of fluid can leak out after the drain is removed. This can be safely managed with a tiny stitch where the drain was inserted.

What happens when I go home?

When you get home, please leave your waterproof dressing on for another 24 to 48 hours. If you have stopped any medications, we will tell you when to restart them.

You can be called back to hospital if the sample taken during the drain insertion shows any signs of infection.

What if I have problems after my paracentesis?

If you experience pain or bleeding, or both, from the drain site or feel unwell, please contact the liver unit (see numbers below) call 111 or go to your nearest A&E department.

How can I self-manage my ascites in between drainage?

You may be prescribed water tablets to help control the ascites between drainage.

Diet is also essential in reducing ascites and for your general health. It would help if you had a diet:

- rich in protein, particularly vegetable protein
- low in salt

Food items with high vegetable protein include:

- nuts, for example, unsalted almonds and walnuts
- beans and pulses, for example lentils and chickpeas

A rough guide to a low-salt diet includes:

- avoiding food items with the red traffic light for salt/sodium in the package description#
- not adding extra salt to your food at the table.

See the British Liver Trust guide to diet with a liver condition.

(britishlivertrust.org.uk/information-and-support/living-with-a-liver-condition/diet-and-liver-disease/cirrhosis-and-diet/)

Or scan the QR code:



How can I book my abdominal paracentesis?

Over time, you will know which symptoms mean you might need an abdominal paracentesis. Monitoring your weight daily is an excellent way to track how quickly the fluid accumulates. Please note your 'dry' weight, that is, the weight after all the fluid has been removed.

If your symptoms return or your weight is increasing drastically (usually more than 6kg above your dry weight), please call the specialist hepatology nurse at the number below.

The unit typically runs the paracentesis clinic every Tuesday and Wednesday. In rare cases, we can try to see you outside of those times. This depends on the level of staffing needed to provide safe and efficient service.

Useful numbers

Specialist hepatology nurses – available Monday to Friday from 08:30 to 16:30.

- 020 3312 1313
- 020 3312 1879

Reception main telephone number

- 020 3312 1804

The unit is closed on weekends and during the holidays.

Please leave a voicemail with your:

- your name
- date of birth
- contact number
- query

A team member will contact you during usual working hours. Do not use this number for emergencies.

Address

Liver unit
10th Floor
QEQM Building
St Mary's Hospital
Praed Street
W2 1NY

My personal abdominal paracentesis record:

My 'dry' weight in kg (what I usually weigh after a drain has been removed):

Litres of fluid I usually have removed on the unit:

Any unique recommendations about my medication:

How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service, and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3312 7777** (10.00 – 16.00, Monday to Friday). You can also email PALS at imperial.pals@nhs.net The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street
London W2 1NY

Email: ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team: imperial.communications@nhs.net

Wi-fi

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: www.imperial.nhs.uk