



Having a Paracentesis

This handout offers information on having a paracentesis and what you need to know before having it done.

What is ascites?

Ascites is the buildup of fluid in the space between the lining of your abdomen (belly) and your abdominal organs (also called peritoneal cavity). If there are cancer cells in this fluid, it is called malignant ascites. Having this buildup of fluid in your abdomen may make you:

- Feel short of breath
- Have pain in your abdomen
- Gain weight

What is a paracentesis?

A paracentesis is a procedure used to remove the buildup of fluid from your abdomen. You can have this procedure done more than once.

Getting ready to have your paracentesis

- If you take a blood thinning medication
You may need to have bloodwork done before your paracentesis. The results of this bloodwork helps the doctor decide if you need to stop your blood thinning medication before your paracentesis. Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any questions about this.
- You will have an ultrasound done. This helps the doctor put the needle in the right place.
- You need to drink fluids and eat your normal diet before your paracentesis.

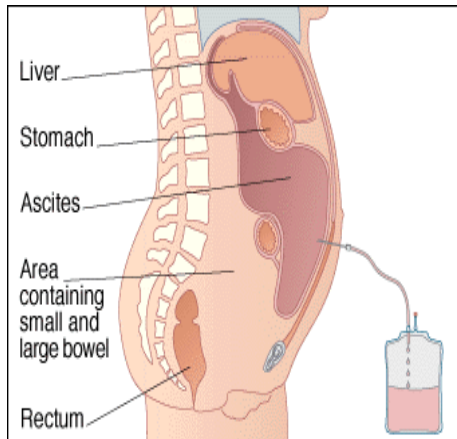
On the day of your paracentesis

- Bring a list of the medications you are taking.
- The doctor and nurse will tell you how a paracentesis is done and answer any questions you have. You will be asked to sign consent for the paracentesis.
- The nurse will take your blood pressure.

Having your paracentesis done

- You will be awake during your paracentesis.
- The skin on your abdomen will be cleaned with an antiseptic. This is to keep you from getting an infection. It will feel cold and wet and may colour your skin pink.
- The doctor will inject a small needle into your abdomen. You will feel the needle stick and then some mild burning. This needle has medication in it to freeze the area so you do not feel pain when the paracentesis needle is put in.

- The paracentesis needle is used to place a small catheter (tube) into your abdomen. The needle is removed but the small catheter stays in place. The small catheter is connected to a bottle or bag to allow the fluid to drain out. The small catheter is removed after the fluid has drained out.
- Tell the doctor or nurse if you feel any pain or discomfort.



This is a picture of a paracentesis.

(Reference: Endoscopy Center of Monroe, 2009)

After your paracentesis

- A small dressing will be put over the site where the fluid was drained out. Keep this dressing on for 24 hours after your paracentesis.
- Some pain in your abdomen right after your paracentesis is normal.
- The nurse will check your vital signs.
- You will be given information on how to contact the doctor or nurse if you have questions or concerns.

Go to the Emergency Department at the hospital closest to you if you:

- New or worsening pain in your abdomen
- Bleeding that soaks through the dressing over your drainage site.
- A fever above 38.3° C/100.9°F at any time or above 38.0° C/100.4°F for more than an hour
- Shakes and chills (with or without a fever)
- Feel weak, dizzy (lightheaded) or faint
- Have redness or swelling from the site where the fluid was drained out

Talk to a member of your healthcare team if you have questions or do not understand any information in this handout.

Last reviewed: March 2025