Having an abdominal drain procedure

This leaflet explains more about having an abdominal drain procedure including the benefits, risks and what you can expect when you come to hospital.

If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

What is ascites?

Ascites is a medical term used to describe a condition where there is too much fluid in the abdomen. The peritoneum (the thin lining found inside the abdominal cavity) produces a small amount of fluid to let the abdominal organs move against each other smoothly. The fluid produced by the peritoneum can be created and reabsorbed in the abdomen. Certain illnesses, however, may cause an imbalance in fluid production and re-absorption and may cause the fluid to build up within the abdominal cavity.

What are the symptoms of ascites?

The abdomen may get swollen and bigger as a result of the fluid build up. You may feel abdominal pain, shortness of breath, nausea and vomiting due to the increasing pressure of fluid within the abdominal cavity. Other symptoms that you may experience include indigestion, poor appetite, reduced mobility and tiredness.

What can be done about ascites?

To relieve the symptoms associated with ascites, it may be necessary to place a small tube in the abdominal cavity to remove the fluid. This procedure is known as an abdominal drain procedure or paracentesis.

What happens during the day of the procedure?

The abdominal drain procedure is a relatively safe and simple procedure. The insertion of the tube may only take 5-10 minutes.

When you attend the day unit, we may do a blood test before we carry out the procedure. A nurse will measure your abdominal girth, blood pressure, pulse and oxygen levels. You will be asked to change into a gown and an advanced nurse practitioner or a specialist registrar will assess your abdomen for ascites and also your suitability for the abdominal drain procedure. We will also place a small cannula (tube) in your arm before the procedure in case you need some fluids during the day.
An ultrasound machine will be used to assess the amount of fluid in the abdomen and to locate areas within the abdominal cavity where the drain tube can be inserted safely.

It is very important that the procedure is undertaken in a sterile way to prevent you from getting an infection, so the doctor or nurse doing your procedure will wear a cap, mask, sterile gown and gloves.

You will be asked to lie on a bed. The nurse or doctor will clean the area where the drain is going to be inserted. A small amount of local anaesthetic will then be injected to the insertion site. This may sting a little bit but will quickly numb the site. Once the local anaesthetic is working, the drain catheter can be inserted. It will then be secured with a dressing and attached to a drainage bag.

A nurse will take your blood pressure, pulse and oxygen level every hour while you are on the day unit to make sure that you are feeling well. The drainage bag will also be emptied regularly and levels of fluid will be recorded.

Do I have to stay in hospital?
Most patients come to the hospital in the morning of the procedure and go home at the end of the day. The fluid will be drained gradually, so you should expect to be in hospital for at least eight hours on the day of the procedure. Sometimes not all the abdominal fluid can be drained within eight hours, and if this is the case, you will need to stay in hospital overnight for further drainage. It may be a good idea to bring a change of clothing with you when you come to see us, just in case.

What will happen after the procedure?
The drain tube will be removed when all the fluid in your abdomen has been drained. A small dressing will be used to cover the incision site.

Are there any risks or complications resulting from abdominal drain?
Abdominal drain procedures carry a small risk. A vital organ in the abdomen may be punctured during the procedure. If this happens, surgical or medical intervention may be necessary. However, this is extremely rare. Sometimes, the drain tube may get blocked, so you may be asked to change your position or sit up during drainage. Occasionally, we may have to change the tube.

Some people may feel tired or experience low blood pressure, so we may give you some fluids or hydration to normalise your blood pressure. Some patients may experience abdominal pain, bleeding from the insertion site, or nodule formation. During your consultation we will advise you on what to do if you experience any of these complications.

You may also experience leakage from the drain site. If leakage continues 48–72 hours after removal of the drain tube, you should let us know immediately. You may require a small stitch to stop the site from leaking any further.

Very rarely people get an infection in the abdominal cavity through the insertion site. Let us know if you have a temperature or notice any redness, swelling or pain around the site.
What do I have to do at home?

You will have a dressing covering the site when the drain tube is removed. Keep the dressing and the insertion site dry for at least 48 hours after the removal of the drain tube. You may have a wash instead of a shower. We will also give you a supply of dressings to take home in case there is a small amount of leakage coming from the insertion site. After the first 48 hours have passed, try to take a shower instead of a bath for the next few days.

If you think you may have an infection, please call us as soon as possible on one of the numbers listed below.

**Contact us**

If you have any questions or concerns about your abdominal drain procedure, please contact us at the cancer day unit on **020 7188 6462**, Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5pm.

Out of hours, you can contact Samaritan ward on **020 7188 8855**, or Hedley Atkins ward on **020 7188 4254**.

To speak directly to an advanced nurse practitioner, call **020 7188 5885** and leave a voicemail. Alternatively, call the hospital switchboard on **020 7188 7188** and ask for bleep number **2385**.

**Pharmacy medicines helpline**

For information about any medicines that you have been prescribed at Guy’s and St Thomas’ hospitals, you can speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

**t:** 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

**Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust’s services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:

**e:** 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas’  **t:** 020 7188 8803 at Guy’s  **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

**Knowledge & Information Centre (KIC)**

For more information about health conditions, support groups and local services, or to search the internet and send emails, please visit the KIC on the Ground Floor, North Wing, St Thomas’ Hospital.

**t:** 020 7188 3416

**NHS Direct**

Offers health information and advice from specially trained nurses over the phone 24 hours a day.

**t:** 0845 4647  **w:** www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

**NHS Choices**

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

**w:** www.nhs.uk