Ascitic Drainage
(Paracentesis)

Acute Medical Unit (AMU)

Contact details
Medical Day Centre (MDC) 01823 343142
Sheppard Ward on 01823 342021 / 01823 343021
What is ascitic drainage (paracentesis)?

It 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 swelling of the abdomen and discomfort. This is known as ascites. Treatment of ascites involves slowing the build-up of fluid and draining it (paracentesis) to relieve symptoms.

How is it done?

The drain is inserted by a doctor. We will ask you to lie on the bed and the area on your stomach will be cleaned with an antiseptic solution. A local anaesthetic will be given. This stings a little at first, but then makes the skin numb. The doctor will make a very small cut and inserts a thin tube, which is then attached to a drainage bag. The ascitic fluid drains from the abdomen into the bag. The tube will be covered with a dressing.

The length of time the drain needs to stay in place depends on the amount of fluid that needs to be drained off, but in most cases the drain should be taken out after six hours. During this time you will be regularly monitored and assessed. When the drain has been removed, there may be a leakage of fluid from the wound and it may need a suitable dressing.

Are there any side-effects or risks from ascitic drainage?

- Your blood pressure may drop as a result of large amount of fluid being taken off your stomach. Your blood pressure will be checked regularly to anticipate and diagnose this problem, and if required Intravenous fluid will be given to treat this.
- Bleeding, infection and pain are the most common complications but they still happen only rarely
- Sometimes no fluid can be obtained and in such a case your doctor may request the drain to be inserted under ultrasound guidance
- The ascitic drain can become blocked. This is usually related to your position and can be resolved by changing your position or sitting upright. However, rarely the drain may need to be replaced.
- Other very rare complications include accidental damage to the bowel, making a small hole, which may require surgical intervention.

If you develop abdominal pain, feel generally unwell, or are concerned that the tube may have moved please let your nurse know.

I still have other questions, who should I ask?

Ask the doctor who is doing the procedure before they start if you have any further concerns. If this is a planned admission to our Medical Day Centre (MDC) you can contact staff at MDC on ext. 3142 who will provide the nursing care, or a doctor on Sheppard ward on ext 2021 and 3021.