

## Drainage of Ascites (paracentesis)

### What is ascites?

Ascites is a collection of fluid in the abdomen, commonly caused by cancer, but can also be due to other reasons. The fluid is produced in the abdominal cavity faster than it can be reabsorbed, causing the abdomen to swell, and sometimes become uncomfortable.

### When and why does it need draining?

Drainage of ascites can be done either to find an answer as to exactly what is causing the build-up of fluid, or because it becomes uncomfortable. If not drained, ascites can cause pain, discomfort, sleepless nights, swollen legs and sometimes difficulties with breathing because of the swelling of the abdomen.

### Who decides when it needs draining?

We are normally guided by you as to when to drain the ascites. If you are feeling uncomfortable, particularly if this has happened before, you are likely to know when you need to have the ascites drained. We would normally confirm that there is fluid to be removed by using an ultrasound scan before draining the ascites. The scan and the drainage of ascites will be done by a doctor, or a surgical care practitioner trained in both scanning and the procedure. The doctor or surgical care practitioner will talk you through the procedure and take your written consent prior to the procedure. Sometimes we may ask your permission for a doctor being trained in the technique to perform the procedure under supervision. You are perfectly entitled to decline if you wish. If there is insufficient fluid to drain, we will talk to you about whether a re- assessment scan usually between 4-7 days later might be worthwhile.

### How is it done?

Drainage is usually done as a day case but occasionally can involve an overnight stay in hospital. An ultrasound scan is performed either; prior to the drainage or at the same time, to show the doctor the right place to drain the fluid. A local anaesthetic is used to numb the skin. After the anaesthetic, a long thin tube is put through the skin into the abdominal

cavity containing the ascites. The local anaesthetic used on the skin may not affect the internal layers of the body, so some people feel some discomfort as the needle goes in. However, this is normally very short-lived, and most find it manageable. Once in place, the tube is taped to the skin, and the ascitic fluid drained off, usually within the next 4-6 hours. The fluid can be clear, straw coloured or blood stained: all are normal. The removal of the fluid itself is painless. Once the ascites has been drained off (commonly between 2 to 9 litres of fluid is removed) the tube is taken out, the small incision is covered with a dressing, and you will be free to go home. Your District Nurse and GP will be told of your stay in hospital, so that they can support you at home after leaving hospital.

### **Can I eat and drink before the procedure?**

You can eat and drink as you usually would prior to the procedure.

### **Can I take my regular medication?**

Yes - unless you are taking a water tablet ( diuretic) or a blood thinner tablet or injections ( anti-coagulant) when specific advice will be give if you are taking any of these medications.

### **How will you feel following the procedure?**

Some people will experience some abdominal discomfort or ache following the procedure, which usually settles within a short time. Simple analgesia i.e. paracetamol may be helpful for this. You may feel fatigued/tired following the drainage for a few days; this is related to proteins being lost in the fluid. If you can eat well during this time it will help, some people may benefit from supplement drinks this can be assessed by the dietician or doctor. Possible problems although draining ascites is almost always uncomplicated, there are rare chances of complications. Injury to the bowel is possible, although using ultrasound to see where to put the drain makes this very rare (1-10 per 10,000). As with the use of any needle, there is the chance of infection at the site of drainage: if you have any redness or tenderness at the site of the needle, please contact the hospital. It can occasionally be difficult or impossible to drain off the ascites as:

- The tube can get blocked.
- The ascites can collect in small separate pockets.
- If there is no safe place to put the drain.

It is not uncommon for the drainage site to leak for a few days. A dressing or occasionally a bag over the area may be needed to catch the leakage. If this is required, the ward nurses will apply the bag and arrange for the district nurse to assess when you leave hospital. Some women also notice some discomfort after the ascites has been removed and can have a change in bowel habit following drainage. Both usually settle within a few days. Diuretics (Water Tablets) may be used to reduce the build-up of ascites. You may be offered spironolactone or frusemide (or both) after the ascites has been removed. If you are on or have commenced diuretics, you may need to have blood tests taken when you go home. If this is necessary a request will be sent to the GP, or arrangements made to re attend the hospital for a blood test.

## **How can I arrange for the ascites to be drained?**

If you feel the ascites needs draining, please ring one of the Clinical nurse specialists. The paracentesis is usually carried out on a Wednesday or Thursday morning, but this depends on the availability of the doctor or Surgical care practitioner and bed availability. Please inform the nurses and doctor if you are receiving chemotherapy treatment or taking anticoagulation medicines (blood thinners) such as warfarin, rivaroxaban tablets or fragmin/Clexane/Tinzaparin injections, as you may need extra blood tests or instruction on your medications. Please bring an overnight bag with you in case you need to stay one night in hospital, although we aim to be able to get you home between 4 and 6pm the same day in most situations.

## **Useful Telephone Numbers**

Clinical Nurse Specialist **0151 702 4186** (Monday to Friday 8-4, outside these hours you can leave a voicemail message)

Gynaecology Ward **0151 708 9988** Ext **4580**

**This leaflet can be made available in different formats on request. If you would like to make any suggestions or comments about the content of this leaflet, then please contact the Patient Experience Team on 0151 702 4353 or by email at [pals@lwh.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@lwh.nhs.uk)**

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