About Your Paracentesis (Abdominal Tap)

This information will help you prepare for your paracentesis at Memorial Sloan Kettering (MSK).

A paracentesis, or an abdominal tap, is a procedure that is done to remove ascites (build-up of fluid) from your abdomen (belly). The fluid buildup can be painful.

Ascites may be caused by:

- Cancer
- An infection
- Inflammation (swelling)
- An abdominal injury
- Cirrhosis of the liver (scarring of the liver)

During your paracentesis, your doctor will place a catheter (small, flexible tube) into your abdomen. The extra fluid will drain out through the catheter.

Before Your Procedure

Before your procedure, you may have tests, including an ultrasound to find the fluid in your abdomen, blood tests, and any other tests necessary to plan your care.

Your doctor or nurse will talk with you about what you can and can’t eat before your procedure.

Ask about your medications

You may need to stop taking some of your medication before your procedure.
We have included some common examples below.

- If you take medication to thin your blood, such as to treat blood clots or to prevent a heart attack or stroke, ask the doctor who prescribes it for you when to stop taking it. Some examples are aspirin, warfarin (Coumadin®), dalteparin (Fragmin®), heparin, tinzaparin (Innohep®), enoxaparin (Lovenox®), clopidogrel (Plavix®), cilostazol (Pletal®), dabigatran (Pradaxa®), and apixaban (Eliquis®).

Tell your doctor or nurse what medications you are taking, including prescription medications, patches, creams, herbal supplements, and over-the-counter medications.

**During Your Procedure**

**What to expect**

After you change into a hospital gown, you will be brought into the procedure room and helped onto an exam table. Your nurse may place an intravenous (IV) catheter into a vein in your arm or hand, unless you already have a central venous catheter (CVC). You will receive fluids through your IV or CVC. You will be attached to equipment that will monitor your vital signs (blood pressure, temperature, and pulse).

A member of your healthcare team will help position you onto your back. Your abdomen will be cleaned. A local anesthetic will be injected in the area where your doctor will be working, to make the area numb.

Your doctor will place a needle in your abdomen. They will put a catheter into your abdomen at the puncture site. The catheter is connected to a bottle by a small tube. The fluid from your abdomen will be drained through the catheter and into the bottle. Don’t move while the catheter is in place.

Once enough fluid has been drained, the catheter will be removed and a small bandage will be placed over the punctured site.

How long your paracentesis will take depends on how much fluid is drained.

The drained fluid will be sent to a lab so that your doctor can find the cause of the build-up.
After Your Procedure

In the hospital

- When you are ready, get up slowly. Tell your doctor or nurse if you feel dizzy or lightheaded.
- You may have some pain or discomfort. Talk to your doctor or nurse about taking pain medication.
- It is normal for a small amount of fluid to leak from the puncture site. Your doctor or nurse will give you bandages to protect your clothing in case this happens.

At home

- Keep your bandage on for 24 hours after your procedure.
- You can shower 24 hours after your procedure. Remove the bandage and wash the puncture site with soap and water. You may want to place a clean bandage over the area if there is any drainage.
- You can go back to your normal activities after your procedure unless your nurse or doctor gives you other instructions.

Call Your Doctor or Nurse if You Have:

- Redness at the puncture site
- Increased pain in your abdomen
- A temperature of 100.4°F (38.0°C) or higher
- Shaking chills
- Shortness of breath
- An increased amount of drainage from your puncture site
If you have any questions, contact a member of your healthcare team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5:00 PM, during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.