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## Having an ascitic drain

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**Centre for Urgent Care**

**Patient Information**





## Introduction

Your doctors have recommended that you have an ascitic drain inserted. This procedure is called abdominal paracentesis. The most common reason for requiring an ascitic drain is to relieve abdominal swelling and discomfort due to excessive fluid in the abdominal cavity (ascites). Your doctor will explain to you why an ascitic drain is recommended for you.

## What is an ascitic drain?

An ascitic drain is a plastic tube that is inserted into the abdominal cavity. It is attached to a bag on the outside. Fluid in the abdominal cavity is drained out and collects in the bag.

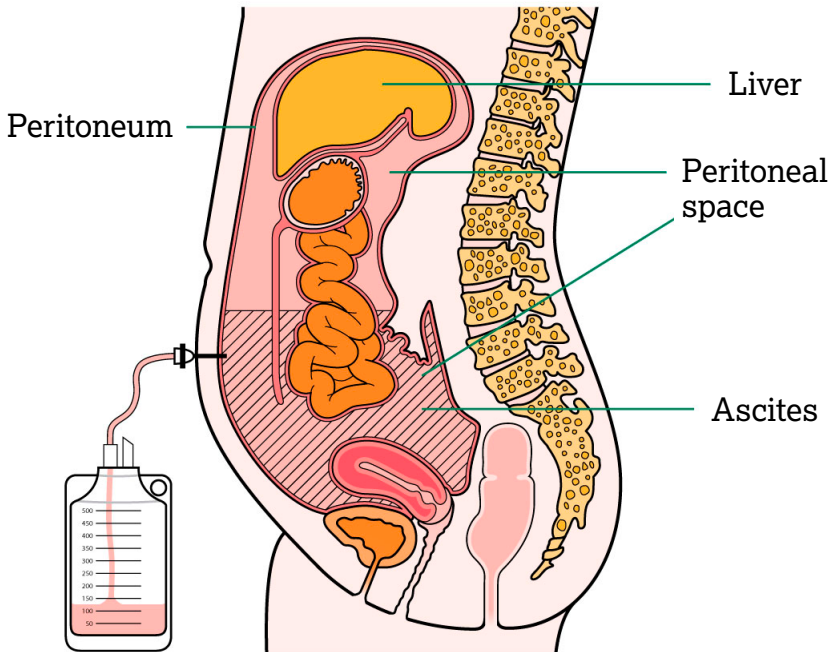


Figure 1. Diagram illustrating the area into which an ascitic drain is inserted. (Image courtesy of Macmillan Cancer Support)

## What will happen on the day?

You will be asked to attend the Centre for Urgent Care (CUC). You must not eat or drink anything for two hours before your arrival time at CUC until instructed by the doctor or nurse. You will be asked to empty your bladder before the procedure.

Firstly, a blood test will be taken. You will then attend the radiology department where an ultrasound technician will check the depth of fluid in your abdomen. A dressing will be placed on your skin to mark the best position for a drain. You will return to CUC to have the drain inserted by a trained doctor or nurse.

Normally the drain is inserted and removed later the same day. Occasionally, you may be required to stay overnight.

Please let the nurse looking after you know if you are anxious about the procedure.

## How is a drain inserted?

An ascitic drain can be inserted at the bedside by a trained doctor or nurse, using local anaesthetic to numb the area. You will be awake throughout the procedure. If you experience any discomfort, please tell the doctor or nurse.

You will be asked to lie on your back on the bed. The mark made in the ultrasound department will be used as a guide to decide the best position to insert the drain. The drain is normally placed in the lower side of the abdomen.

The doctor or nurse will then put on an apron and sterile gloves. The area marked will be cleaned using an antiseptic solution. A local anaesthetic will then be injected just under the skin. This can sting temporarily, but will ensure that the area is numb. Once the local anaesthetic has taken effect, the drain will be inserted. This can take about 10 minutes. You might feel some pushing. Once the drain is inserted, the drain will be secured with a dressing. Some of the fluid will be sent to the laboratory for analysis.

## **What happens after the drain is inserted?**

After the drain is inserted, the nurses will closely monitor the amount of fluid draining out. Your blood pressure and other observations will be checked frequently while the fluid is draining. The drain may need to be clamped temporarily after each litre is drained. If you feel unwell at any time, please inform the nurse or doctor.

## **How long will the drain need to stay in for?**

Where possible, we aim to remove the drain later that day so the majority of patients are able to go home the same day. Rarely, it is necessary to stay overnight in hospital to allow more time for the fluid to drain.

## **How is the drain removed?**

The drain is removed easily by trained nurses. The drain is gently pulled out and a dressing applied over the wound. Occasionally, fluid leaks from the site of the drain. If fluid is soaking through the dressing, a small bag can be applied to the skin to collect the fluid. This will settle down and stop over a few days as the site heals.

## **What can go wrong?**

As with all procedures there are potential risks associated with inserting an ascitic drain. The risk of complications is very small, but bleeding and infection are possible. Very rarely there is injury to other organs in the abdomen, including the bowel, liver and bladder.

## **How long will it take me to recover?**

We hope your symptoms will improve after the procedure. It may take a few days for the wound to heal. You may need to take some painkillers if you experience any pain around the site. Fluid often collects again after the drain has been removed. If your symptoms return in the days or weeks after your ascitic drain, please contact your key worker for advice.

## Contact details

If you develop a fever or worsening pain, please contact:

**The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline: 020 8915 6899**

You can ring the hotline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Call us straight away if you are feeling unwell or are worried about the side effects of cancer treatments.

This service provides specialist advice and support to all Royal Marsden patients, as well as to their carers, and both hospital and community-based doctors and nurses caring for Royal Marsden patients.

## References

This booklet is evidence based wherever the appropriate evidence is available, and represents an accumulation of expert opinion and professional interpretation.

Details of the references used in writing this booklet are available on request from:

The Royal Marsden Help Centre

Telephone: Chelsea 020 7811 8438 / 020 7808 2083

Sutton 020 8661 3759 / 3951

Email: [patientcentre@rmh.nhs.uk](mailto:patientcentre@rmh.nhs.uk)

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Should you require information in an alternative format, please contact The Royal Marsden Help Centre.

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[royalmarsden.org](http://royalmarsden.org)

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