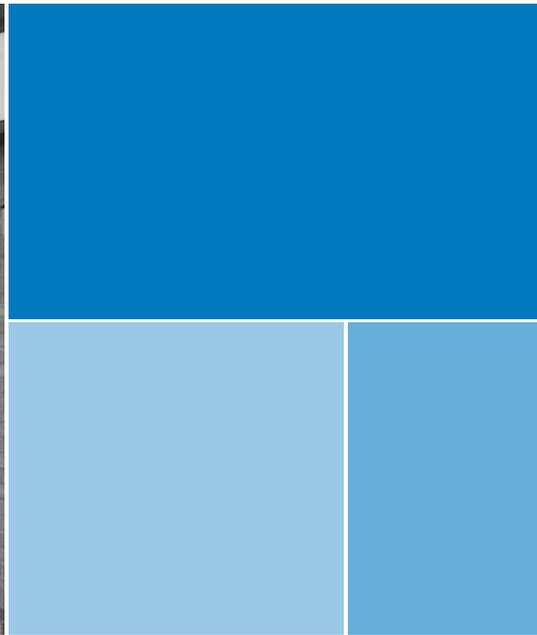


# Ascites: diagnosis and treatment



[Patient Information](#)

This leaflet is designed to answer the most frequent questions that patients ask about ascites, its investigation, and possible treatments.

## What is ascites?

Ascites is the name doctors give to the build up of fluid in your stomach. This fluid can build up over a period of time or quite suddenly and settles between the organs in your stomach and your stomach wall.

## What causes ascites?

Ascites is most commonly caused by scarring of the liver, called liver cirrhosis and less commonly may be the result of certain types of cancers, for example, stomach or ovarian cancers.

## What are the symptoms of ascites?

- The extra fluid in your stomach may cause your stomach to be swollen and feel uncomfortable or painful.
- Weight gain due to the extra fluid.
- Increased shortness of breath.
- Reduced appetite, feeling full quickly or feeling sick.

Sometimes the fluid in your stomach can become infected which can cause you to have a temperature and feel ill. You should contact your doctor if this is the case and let them know immediately.

## How does your doctor check ascites?

Certain investigations may be requested by your doctor. These may include:

- Blood tests, which will often be taken to check the level of chemicals in your body.
- An ultrasound scan of your stomach. This is to look at both your liver and to assess the amount of fluid in your stomach.
- Your doctor may need to test the fluid in your stomach and to get to it they may need to do a small procedure called an ascitic tap.

## What is an ascitic tap?

This is where a small amount of the fluid is taken from your stomach. Your skin is numbed so you shouldn't feel any pain and the fluid is taken using a needle and syringe. This fluid is then sent to the laboratory to be tested for any infection and also lets the doctor know if further tests may be needed. If an infection is identified you may need antibiotics.

## What treatment is there for ascites?

- We recommend you follow a low sodium (salt) diet. A lot of salt is hidden in food and does not just mean the table salt we sometimes use on our food. The types of food high in hidden salts usually come in cans, packets, or jars. We can help you follow a low salt diet.
- We can try and remove excess fluid using medicines called diuretics, which you might know as water tablets. These medicines help pass your urine more quickly through your body so you will need to have your blood checked regularly when on these tablets.
- You may need daily or regular weights to check the effectiveness of our treatment by seeing if the fluid is going up or down in your stomach.
- A procedure similar to an ascitic tap, officially called paracentesis and more commonly called an ascitic drain, may be required to help treat your ascites and relieve any symptoms you may have.

## What is paracentesis?

This is where the skin is numbed on the side of the stomach. A thin plastic tube is then inserted into the stomach to drain the fluid that has collected. It can take up to six hours to drain completely and can remove anything up to 10 litres of ascites if required. The fluid is collected into a bag attached to the plastic tube.

During the procedure we will measure the fluid drained,

regularly empty the drainage bag, check your temperature, pulse and blood pressure.

Once all the fluid has been drained the plastic tube is removed and a clean dressing or plaster put on the tiny hole made by the plastic tube.

Ascites can collect again over time so further paracentesis may be required at a later date.

## What are the benefits of an ascitic tap or paracentesis?

Removal of a small amount of fluid for examination helps to confirm the cause of the ascites and look for any infection. Removal of large amounts of fluid by paracentesis will help improve discomfort, shortness of breath, and loss of appetite. Benefits also include better circulation (blood flow) especially to the lower limbs.

## Are there any risks involved with an ascitic tap or paracentesis?

As with any procedure there is a small chance of side-effects or complications such as;

- Failure to be able insert the tube or drain any fluid.
- The tube falling out or getting blocked.
- Infection at the drain site.
- Bleeding at the drain site.
- Abdominal pain.
- Infection of the remaining fluid or lining of the abdomen (known as peritonitis).
- Damage to other organs e.g. liver, or making a hole in the bowel. This is rare and would almost certainly require an operation to repair.
- Low blood pressure and damage to the kidneys. We give an

infusion of human albumin through a needle in your arm (cannula) during the procedure to prevent this happening. Your team of health professionals are here to help you with your condition and are happy to answer any further questions you may have so please do not hesitate to ask them!

### If there is a problem

If you have any problems concerning your procedure please contact either your GP or telephone the hospital on 01493 452452 and ask to be connected to the ward/department where the procedure took place.

Alternatively if you are very concerned please attend the Accident and Emergency Department.

# Notes





James Paget University Hospitals



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### Courtesy and respect

- A welcoming and positive attitude
  - Polite, friendly and interested in people
  - Value and respect people as individuals
- So people feel **welcome**

### Attentively kind and helpful

- Look out for dignity, privacy & humanity
  - Attentive, responsive & take time to help
  - Visible presence of staff to provide care
- So people feel **cared for**

### Responsive communication

- Listen to people & answer their questions
  - Keep people clearly informed
  - Involve people
- So people feel **in control**

### Effective and professional

- Safe, knowledgeable and reassuring
  - Effective care / services from joined up teams
  - Organised and timely, looking to improve
- So people feel **safe**



The hospital is able to arrange for an interpreter to assist you in communicating effectively with staff during your stay through INTRAN.

If you need an interpreter or a person to sign, please let us know.

If you require a large print version of this booklet, please contact PALS on  
**01493 453240**

Author:  
Dr Matthew Williams, Consultant  
Gastroenterologist

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