

*If you have
any questions,
please ask your
physician or
nurse.*

Paracentesis

A paracentesis is done to drain excess fluid found in the abdomen between the lining of the abdominal wall and the organs such as the liver, gallbladder, spleen and stomach. A small amount of fluid (peritoneal fluid) is always present in the abdomen. When this fluid builds up, this is called ascites. Large amounts of extra fluid in the abdomen can cause your abdomen to feel tight and painful and may cause shortness of breath. The build-up may be caused by:

- Liver disease
- Infection
- Inflammation
- Injury
- Tumor

A paracentesis helps to:

- Relieve pain and shortness of breath caused by the build-up of fluid
- Find the cause of the build-up of fluid

The procedure takes about 30 minutes to an hour and can be done as an outpatient in the Interventional Radiology (IR) Department. If you are in the hospital, it may also be done in your room. A paracentesis may be done by a physician, a physician's assistant (PA) or an advanced practice nurse (APN).

Before the procedure

Outpatients

Come to the 4th Floor of the Feinberg Pavilion, 251 East Huron Street, 1 hour before your procedure. Check in with the receptionist. Parking is available for patients and visitors in the garage at 222 East Huron Street, across from the Feinberg and Galter pavilions. For discounted rates, please bring your parking ticket with you. Tickets can be validated at the Customer Service desk on the 1st or 2nd floor of the Feinberg and Galter pavilions.

When you arrive at the IR Department, you and 1 member of your family will meet with a staff member who will bring you to the prep and recovery area. Here they will review your health history, medicines and allergies.

Notify your physician:

- If you have any allergies
- If you are taking any prescription, over-the-counter or herbal medicines
- If you are taking blood-thinning medicines or have bleeding problems
- If you are or may be pregnant

You may need to have blood tests to check your blood clotting level. An ultrasound will be used to locate the area of fluid to be drained.

All patients

After reviewing the procedure and answering any questions you may have, you will be asked to sign a written consent.

During the procedure

Your nurse or technologist will help position you on an exam table. It is important to remain still during the procedure.

The area on your abdomen where the needle will be inserted will be cleaned. Numbing medicine will be injected into the area. This will sting for a few seconds. Once the area feels numb, a needle will be inserted into your abdomen. You may feel pressure as the needle is inserted. Then, the needle will be connected to a syringe or tube attached to a collection bag.

When large amounts of fluid are removed, you may feel light-headed. You may be given fluids through an IV (into the vein) to prevent this.

After the procedure

Tell the nurse if you feel:

- Dizzy or light-headed
- Sharp pain in your abdomen

A dressing will be placed over the puncture site on your abdomen. Small amounts of clear fluid may leak out from the site over the next 1 to 2 days.

If ordered by your physician, the fluid collected will be sent for testing. It can take a few days to have results. Your primary physician will discuss a treatment plan based on the results of the testing.

Outpatients

After going home, you may resume your normal diet and activities. You may remove your dressing and shower after 24 hours. Please do not soak in a bathtub, hot tub or swimming pool for 5 days after the procedure.

Call your physician right away if you have any of the following:

- Fever higher than 100 degrees F
- Severe abdominal pain
- Increased redness or tenderness at the needle site
- Blood in your urine
- Bleeding or increased drainage from the needle site

Northwestern Medicine – Health Information Resources

For more information, contact Northwestern Memorial Hospital’s Alberto Culver Health Learning Center (HLC) at hlc@nm.org, or by calling 312.926.5465. Health information professionals can help you find the information you need and provide you with personal support at no charge.

For more information about Northwestern Medicine, please visit our website at nm.org.

Para asistencia en español, por favor llamar al Departamento de Representantes para Pacientes al 312.926.3112.

The entities that come together as Northwestern Medicine are committed to representing the communities we serve, fostering a culture of inclusion, delivering culturally competent care, providing access to treatment and programs in a nondiscriminatory manner and eliminating healthcare disparities. For questions, please call either Northwestern Memorial Hospital’s Patient Representatives Department at 312.926.3112, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363 or the Northwestern Medical Group Patient Representatives Department at 312.695.1100, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363.

Developed by: NMH Interventional Radiology and Oncology Nursing