Paracentesis: A Guide for Patients

What is a Paracentesis?

Paracentesis (also known as an abdominal tap) is a procedure to remove fluid from the abdomen. It is done with a needle that is inserted through the abdominal wall. Normally, the abdomen contains only a small amount of fluid. In certain conditions, large amounts of fluid can accumulate in the abdomen.

There are two kinds of abdominal taps:
- Diagnostic tap - a small amount of fluid is taken and sent to the laboratory for testing.
- Large volume tap – several liters may be removed to relieve abdominal pain and fluid buildup.

Will it hurt?

The radiologist will use a local anesthetic (numbing medication similar to Novacaine used by dentists). You may feel some pressure during the procedure, but most patients experience minimal discomfort with the use of a local anesthetic.

What will happen during the procedure?

The test will be performed in the radiology department. You will have a specially trained ultrasound technologist to assist you and the radiologist during the procedure. A registered nurse will check your vital signs and ask some questions to make sure that you are ready for the test. The radiologist performing the exam will explain the procedure, including the benefits and risks, and obtain written consent after all your questions and concerns have been answered.

Some initial ultrasound pictures will be taken for the radiologist to view before your test begins. Once the procedure begins, your skin will be cleaned with an antiseptic solution to avoid infection. Local anesthetic (numbing medication) is injected into the skin. Once the area is numb, the radiologist passes a special type of needle through the skin into the abdomen. The needle is then removed and a thin plastic tube will remain in place. The fluid collection is then drained thru the tube. Once all the fluid is removed, the plastic tube
is removed and a bandaid is applied. Your nurse will then take your vital signs and make sure that you are okay before being discharged home.

**How will I learn the results?**

Immediately after the procedure, the fluid will be taken to the laboratory for analysis if requested by the referring doctor. Some initial results may be available to your doctor within 24 hours, but for the complete analysis results, it will usually take 3 days. Your doctor who ordered the procedure will get the results as soon as they are available and can relay them to you.

**What if I have other questions?**

If you have any questions, concerns, or need to reschedule your appointment you may call (310) 784-6320 M-F from 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. and speak to an Imaging RN.