However, if there is large amount of fluid, the procedure will take place in the ward under the supervision of the doctors and nurses and the drain will stay in place for up to 24 hours.

It is possible for the ascites to build up again and drainage may be needed more than once.

**What possible problems are there?**

Usually the fluid will be drained off slowly as a sudden release of pressure in the abdomen can cause a drop in blood pressure.

As soon as the drain is in place, up to a litre of fluid may be safely removed. Following this, drainage should occur more slowly. Your blood pressure will be checked during the procedure.

The ascitic drain can become blocked. This can sometimes be resolved by simply changing your position or sitting upright. Occasionally the drain may need to be replaced.

As the drain is also a possible source of infection, your temperature will be checked for any signs.

When the drain has been removed, there may be a leakage of fluid from the wound until it heals. The site will need to be covered with a dressing or drainage bag until the leakage has stopped.

**Are there any other way of managing ascites?**

The doctor may prescribe a diuretic (water tablet) call Spironolactone. This can result in you wanting to pass urine more than normal, but will slow the build-up of the ascitic fluid.

Something else that may be considered is a peritoneo-venous shunt (sometimes called a Levine shunt). This is a permanent shunt inserted into the peritoneal cavity and drains the ascitic fluid directly into a large vein. The procedure is more complicated and usually requires a general anaesthetic and intensive monitoring for the first 24-48 hours in a high-dependency unit to check it is working properly.

**Further information please contact:**

St Benedict’s Hospice
Monkwearmouth Hospital
Newcastle Road, Sunderland. SR5 1NB
Telephone: (0191) 569 9195
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**NHS South of Tyne and Wear (serving Gateshead Primary Care Trust, South Tyneside Primary Care Trust and Sunderland Teaching Primary Care Trust) is committed to raising the standard of written information for patients, their carers, people who use the NHS and the general public.**

This information can be made available in another format or language on request. If you require further copies of this leaflet please contact St Benedict’s Hospice

Tel: (0191) 569 9192

Production date: June 2010 Author: Modern Matron Clinical Lead Code: 0610/238
This information leaflet has been prepared to help you understand more about drainage of abdominal fluid.

We hope it will answer any questions you might have about your condition and proposed treatment.

If you are unsure or concerned about anything, please ask the nurse or your doctor.

**What is ascites?**

Inside the abdomen there is a membrane called the peritoneum which has two layers. One layer lines the abdominal wall and the other layer covers the organs inside the abdominal cavity.

The peritoneum produces a fluid that acts as a lubricant and allows the abdominal organs to glide smoothly over one another.

Sometimes an excess of this fluid can build up between the two layers and this is called ascites.

**What causes ascites?**

Ascites can be a symptom of many types of cancer. The types of cancer that are more likely to cause ascites are: breast, the main airway of the lung (bronchus), large bowel (colon), stomach, pancreas, ovary, lining of the womb (endometrium). There may be several reasons of the build-up of ascites:

- If cancer cells have spread to the lining of the abdomen, they can irritate it and cause fluid to build up.
- If the liver is affected by cancer cells, this may block the circulation of blood through the liver. This can lead to a build-up of fluid in the abdomen.
- If the liver is damaged, it may produce less blood protein. This may upset the body's fluid balance, causing build-ups in body tissues including the abdomen.
- Cancer cells can block the lymphatic system. The lymphatic system is a network of fine channels running throughout the body. One of its functions is to drain off excess fluid (through the urine). If some of these channels are blocked, the system cannot drain efficiently and fluid can build up.

The excess fluid can be drained off.

**What are the symptoms of ascites?**

The symptoms of ascites can be extremely distressing.

The abdomen becomes very swollen and distended, and this can be uncomfortable or painful.

You may find sitting up or walking difficult, and generally feel uncomfortable. It can make you feel very tired and breathless, and cause feelings of sickness or being sick, indigestion, and a reduced appetite.

**What is ascitic drainage?**

Treatment of ascites involves slowing the build-up of fluid and draining it (paracentesis) to relieve symptoms.

The drain is inserted by a doctor and the procedure can take place at the bedside. Sometimes, however, this is done in the Ultrasound Department whilst scanning the abdomen. This helps the doctor locate exactly where to put the drain, especially if the fluid appears to be in small pockets and cannot all be drained at once.

You will be asked to lie on the bed and the area on your stomach will be cleaned with an antiseptic solution to prevent infection.

A local anaesthetic will be given.

The doctor will make a very small cut and inserts a thin tube (cannula), which is then attached to a drainage bag.

The ascitic fluid drains from the abdomen into the drainage bag. It may be necessary to secure the cannula with a couple of stitches and cover it with a dressing.

The length of time the drain needs to stay in place depends on the amount of fluid that needs to be drained off.

Sometimes a small amount of fluid can be drained in the Outpatient Clinic or Day Hospice.