Paracentesis

Needing Paracentesis
Your doctor has found that you have a buildup of fluid in your belly, this is called ascites. The provider will do a procedure called a paracentesis to help drain some of the fluid and to find out why fluid is building up.

During the paracentesis, the provider will use an ultrasound to locate the fluid. They will then place a needle or thin, plastic tube into the stomach region to reach the fluid, we may remove a small sample of the fluid for testing. This sample helps the provider figure out what may be causing the fluid build-up.

If there is too much fluid in your belly, the doctor may also remove some of it to help relieve pressure caused by the fluid. This is very helpful if there is so much fluid that you are in pain or having trouble breathing.

Common reasons for needing a paracentesis include:

- Recent fluid build-up with no clear cause.
- To help diagnose an infection.
- To help diagnose cancer.
- To remove fluid and help you breathe with less effort.

Risks
Some of the risks of a paracentesis include:

- **Pain** – You may feel a poke as the provider inserts the needle into the stomach region. Numbing medications are used to lessen the pain.
- **Bleeding** – When the provider inserts the needle, there is a risk of piercing a blood vessel. If this happens, the bleeding is often minor and will stop on its own. You may notice a bruise.
- **Bowel injury (perforation)** – Rarely, the needle punctures the bowel. Most often, the small hole seals over quickly by itself. If not, the bowel contents can leak into the abdomen and cause an infection. In this case, patients may need surgery.

What to Expect After the Procedure
After the numbing medicine wears off, you may feel some pain at the site. You can return to your normal routine, as you feel able.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 9/2025 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#6339