Drainage of Ascitic fluid (paracentesis)

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What is ascites?

Ascites is the build up of fluid in the abdomen. Normally, there is a small amount of fluid between the two linings of the tummy. This fluid helps the organs in the tummy to glide smoothly over one another. When the balance of fluid production and absorption is disturbed, there is an increase in the amount of fluid in the tummy. There are many reasons why people develop ascites. Chronic liver disease is a common cause.

What symptoms does it cause?

- Discomfort/Pain in your tummy
- Shortness of breath
- Nausea & Vomiting
- Poor appetite
- Reduced mobility
- Constipation

What can be done about it?

The symptoms can be improved by removing the fluid from the tummy. This can be done by taking medications called diuretics (water tablets) or by draining the fluid through a plastic tube. Your doctor can give you more information on these options.
What does ascitic drainage (paracentesis) involve?

You will be asked to lie on a bed. The skin where the drain will be inserted will be cleaned. The doctor will give you an injection of local anaesthetic to numb the area. A small cut is made in the tummy where the drainage tube will be inserted. The tube is attached to a bag in which the fluid collects. A dressing will be placed over the area to keep the tube in place.

Possible side effects of procedure

- Feeling tired
- Slight increase of pain in tummy
- Leakage of fluid from the site where the drain was inserted (for up to 72 hours after procedure)

What are the risks?

The risks of paracentesis are rare with less than 1 in 100 people experiencing any of the following complications:

- Infection of your tummy
- Bleeding from drain site
- Damage to organs inside your tummy

What happens after the procedure?

You may be asked to sit in a chair and given a drip containing albumin (one of the body's proteins which stops you getting dehydrated) whilst the fluid is being drained. The drain will stay in for 6 hours before it is removed.
If you or the individual you are caring for need support reading this leaflet please ask a member of staff for advice.

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