

Ascites and ascitic drainage



**Marie
Curie**

Build-up of fluid in the
abdomen (tummy) and
how it can be treated

* Calls are free from landlines and mobiles. Your call may be recorded for training and monitoring purposes.

Introduction

Ascites (pronounced ‘ah-sigh-tees’) is fluid that has built up inside your abdomen (tummy). Ascites might make you feel uncomfortable, breathless and sick, and it may be worrying for you and your loved ones. There are treatments that can help you feel better, including having the fluid drained off.

Your family and friends may also find this leaflet useful. If you have any questions or concerns about ascites, speak to your healthcare professionals who will be able to support you. You can also contact our free Support Line on **0800 090 2309***.



Philip Hardman/Marie Curie

Contents

What is ascites?	3
What causes ascites?	3
What are the symptoms of ascites?	3
What tests might I have?	4
What are the treatments for ascites?	4
What is ascitic drainage?	5
What does ascitic drainage involve?	5
What will happen afterwards?	7
What are the risks involved?	7
Will the ascites come back?	8
How Marie Curie can help	9
About this information	11

What is ascites?

The fluid that has built up inside your abdomen is called ascites.

If the fluid builds up to a certain level it may cause you some discomfort, make you feel sick or breathless, or it may affect your mobility.

What causes ascites?

Ascites can be caused by different conditions. Some of these causes are cancers, and some are other illnesses. These conditions include:

- cancers such as ovarian, breast, bowel, pancreas and lung
- diseases of the liver
- heart failure
- tuberculosis (TB).

What are the symptoms of ascites?

If you have ascites, you might experience:

- discomfort or pain in the abdomen
- nausea and vomiting (feeling sick and being sick)
- breathlessness
- being less able to walk or move (because your abdomen feels so heavy).

What tests might I have?

Your doctor might arrange some tests to find out if you have ascites. This could include a blood test, an ultrasound scan or a CT scan.

They may also take a sample of fluid from your abdomen. This is done with a small needle (about the same size that's used to take blood). This allows them to work out the best way to treat your ascites.

What are the treatments for ascites?

Treatments aim to stop the fluid building up or to remove the fluid that has collected. These include:

- treating the cause of ascites, if possible
- medication to manage any pain, nausea or vomiting
- medication to reduce the fluid – sometimes called diuretic or water tablets
- inserting a tube into your abdomen to drain the fluid (this is called ascitic drainage or paracentesis).

What is ascitic drainage?

Ascitic drainage is a way to remove the fluid from your abdomen. It's also known as paracentesis.

Your healthcare professional will explain how it works in more detail and ask you to complete a consent form. Let them know if you have any questions or concerns about it.

What does ascitic drainage involve?

Ascitic drainage is usually done in a hospice or hospital. You might need to have a blood test a few days before the drainage. You will also need to have an ultrasound scan of your abdomen.

During the drainage you will lie back on a bed. Your doctor will feel your abdomen and inject a local anaesthetic. This numbs the area, so you don't feel anything sharp when the needle goes in.

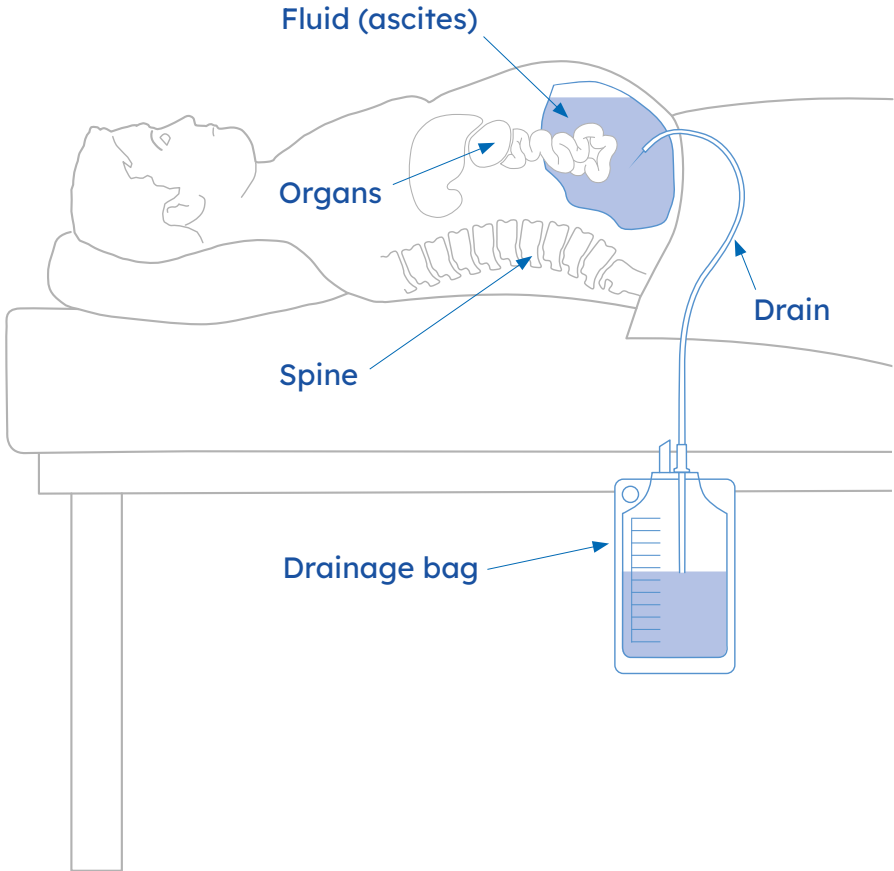
Your doctor might do an ultrasound scan of your abdomen during the procedure. They will pass a thin plastic tube through your skin and into your abdomen, using a needle. The tube is connected to a drainage bag to collect the fluid. The drain will stay in for around 6–8 hours. During this time, you will have your blood pressure, heart rate and temperature checked regularly.

Usually 4–6 litres of fluid are drained off, but it may be more. Let your doctor or nurse know if you feel uncomfortable or unwell at any time.

Ascites and ascitic drainage

You might need to have a drip for fluids, or an albumin (protein) infusion when the drain is in. This depends on the cause of your ascites.

Ascitic drainage



What will happen afterwards?

Once the drain is removed, you will stay in the hospice or hospital for a while so that the healthcare professionals can check that you're well enough to go home. You might be able to go home on the same day, or you might stay in overnight. This depends on how you're feeling and whether you have any other concerns that the healthcare professionals can help you with.

What are the risks involved?

Ascitic drainage is a simple and safe procedure. Your doctor or nurse will carry out a thorough assessment before the procedure to reduce the risk of any complications. However, some complications may occur.

Common problems include:

- increased tiredness during, or in the days after, the procedure
- discomfort during the procedure
- leakage of fluid from the drain site after it's removed
- low blood pressure.

Very rare problems include:

- bleeding inside your tummy
- making a hole in the bowel when the drain goes in (called perforation of the bowel)
- infection.

Your healthcare professionals will look after you during the drainage so that any of these things can be treated quickly. If you have any concerns, speak to your doctor or nurse.

Will the ascites come back?

Sometimes, ascites builds up again over the following weeks and months after an ascitic drainage. Your doctor or nurse might recommend starting or continuing diuretic (water) tablets to try to help the fluid stay away for longer.

Sometimes people need to have another ascitic drainage. If the ascites keeps coming back, you might have a permanent drain put in. This will usually be done in a hospital. Your specialist nurse or doctor will talk to you about the best option for you.

How Marie Curie can help

Marie Curie is here for anyone with an illness they're likely to die from, and those close to them. Whatever the illness, wherever you are, we're with you to the end.

Marie Curie Support Line

0800 090 2309*

Our free Support Line is for anyone with an illness they're likely to die from and those close to them. Our team, including nurses and specialist Energy Support Officers, offers practical and emotional support on everything from symptom management and day-to-day care to financial information and bereavement support. Our Support Line is available in over 200 languages, or via webchat at mariecurie.org.uk/support. Open between 8am to 6pm from Monday to Friday, and 11am to 5pm on Saturday.

Marie Curie Companions

Companion volunteers focus on what's important to you and those close to you. It might be accompanying you to appointments, being there to listen to how you're feeling without judgment, or stepping in so family or carers can take a break. Companions provide the emotional and practical support you want - at home, in hospital or over the phone.

mariecurie.org.uk/companions

Marie Curie Telephone Bereavement Service

Get ongoing bereavement support over the phone from the same volunteer. You can access up to six sessions of 45 minutes. We can help if your bereavement was expected, happened recently or was some time ago.

mariecurie.org.uk/bereavement

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Marie Curie Online Community

Our Online Community is a space for you to share thoughts, feelings and experiences. It's moderated by the Marie Curie Support Line team, who can also help answer your questions.

community.mariecurie.org.uk

Marie Curie Hospice care where it's needed

Our hospices

Our hospices help people with any illness they're likely to die from, and the people close to them, receive the support they need. From medical and physical support to psychological and emotional care, whatever your illness, at whatever stage of the journey, we help you to live the best life possible, right to the end.

mariecurie.org.uk/hospices

Hospice care at home

Our nurses, healthcare assistants and other healthcare professionals bring the clinical, practical and emotional help you need to you, in the comfort of your own home. And we offer support to the people close to you too - from reassurance and practical information to letting them take a break.

mariecurie.org.uk/nurses

Looking for more information?

If you found this booklet useful, we have free information available online at mariecurie.org.uk/support or to order at mariecurie.org.uk/publications

About this information

This booklet was produced by Marie Curie's Information and Support team. It has been developed with people affected by terminal illness, and health and social care professionals.

If you'd like the list of sources used to create this information, please email review@mariecurie.org.uk or call the free Marie Curie Support Line on **0800 090 2309***.

Notice

The information in this publication is provided for the benefit and personal use of people with a terminal illness, their families and carers.

This information is provided as general guidance for information purposes only. It should not be considered as medical or clinical advice, or used as a substitute for personalised or specific advice from a qualified medical practitioner. In respect of legal, financial or other matters covered by this information, you should also consider seeking specific professional advice about your personal circumstances.

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Did you find this information useful?

If you have feedback about this booklet, please email us at review@mariecurie.org.uk or call the free Marie Curie Support Line on **0800 090 2309***.

Your notes

Marie Curie

Marie Curie is the UK's leading end of life charity. Whatever the illness, wherever you are, we're with you to the end.

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Marie Curie provides free support over the phone in over 200 languages, and via webchat, to anyone with an illness they're likely to die from and those close to them.

Our team, including nurses and specialist Energy Support Officers, offers practical and emotional support on everything from symptom management and day-to-day care to financial information and bereavement support. Visit mariecurie.org.uk/support

We also have an Online Community where you can share thoughts, feelings and experiences at community.mariecurie.org.uk

We can't do it without you

Our free information and support services are entirely funded by your generous donations. Thanks to you, we can continue to offer people what they need, when they need it.

To donate, visit mariecurie.org.uk/donate

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