

Paracentesis/Thoracentesis Procedure

What is a paracentesis or thoracentesis?

A paracentesis is a procedure used to drain fluid from the abdomen. The fluid that collects in the peritoneal cavity or abdomen is called ascites. A thoracentesis is a procedure used to drain fluid from the chest cavity. This fluid collects in the pleural space around the lung and is called a pleural effusion. Ultrasound is used to verify the presence or absence of drainable fluid and to help the physician guide the needle into a safe pocket of fluid.

How does the ultrasound work?

Ultrasound sends sound waves into the body using a transducer, a hand-held device that sends and receives sound waves. For the exam, the sonographer will apply warm gel to your abdomen and place the transducer against your skin to take pictures. When the sound waves reflect back to the transducer from inside the body, an image is created on the screen. Ultrasound does NOT use radiation.

How should I prepare for a paracentesis or thoracentesis?

- For optimal drainage of fluid, try to eat light on the day of your procedure
- Wear loose-fitting clothing that is easy to take off
- If you have been requested to get blood drawn before the procedure, remember to arrive at least 1 hour early, so your procedure is not delayed.
- Do not take any blood thinners 5 days prior to the procedure (ie: aspirin, Coumadin, heparin, etc.) If you are unsure of a medication, please call the ultrasound department.

How long will it take?

- 90 minutes

What are some reasons a doctor may order an ultrasound?

- Pain
- Shortness of breath
- Abdominal distention
- Liver disease (cirrhosis, hepatitis, etc)
- Kidney disease
- Pneumonia
- Cancer

- Other

What will happen during the exam?

You will lie on your back on a bed or sitting up on the edge of the bed, and will need to remove your clothing covering the area that needs to be scanned. The sonographer will apply warm gel onto your abdomen or your back and then he/she will place the transducer on your skin. By moving the position of the transducer they will obtain the images of needed for the exam.

What will happen during the procedure?

You will either lie down or sit up depending on which drainage you are having. The radiologist (ultrasound doctor) will numb the area where the catheter will be placed. He/she will next insert the catheter through the skin into the fluid. The needle is removed and a soft, plastic tube stays in place as the fluid is drained out into a separate container. The sonographer will also be in the room taking your blood pressure, keeping you comfortable, and assisting the radiologist.

How do I get the results of the exam?

If there are any tests done on the fluid drained from your body, the results will go to the doctor who ordered the exam. Most of these results are available within 3-5 business days; however, some may take longer.