

Preparing for Your Paracentesis Related to Your Cancer

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What is a paracentesis?

- Paracentesis is a simple procedure to remove fluid from your belly. It is commonly called a tap.
- You may need a tap to relieve pressure caused by a build up of fluid in your belly.
- This procedure is done in an outpatient clinic or at the bedside in an inpatient setting.

Why does fluid build up?

- There is a small layer of fluid between your organs. This fluid moistens the surface of the organs. Some medical conditions such as cancer may cause too much of this fluid to build up in the belly. This is called ascites.

When do I need a tap?

You may need a tap when your belly looks and feels bigger from the fluid build up, and it makes you:

- Uncomfortable (for example, you have difficulty bending over or turning while in bed).
- Have difficulty breathing (this is from the fluid pressure on your lungs).
- Having difficulty eating or are unable to eat (this is from the fluid pressure on your stomach).

What happens before the tap?

- When you arrive for your tap, your cancer care team will explain the procedure, including the risks and benefits.
- Your cancer care team will measure your weight before and after the procedure.
- You will be asked to go to the bathroom and empty your bladder.
- Then, you will lie down on a bed or stretcher.
- You may have an ultrasound scan of your belly at the bedside to find the safest place to do the tap.

What happens during the tap?

- Your belly will be cleaned to prevent infection.
- A member of your cancer care team will inject a numbing medication (local anesthetic) into the skin where the tap will be done. This may sting as it begins to work.
- The tap is done with a special needle that has a thin tube inside, called a catheter. Your cancer care team will carefully insert the needle and catheter through the numbed skin into your belly. You may feel some pressure. If you feel pain, please tell your cancer care team.
- The needle is then removed, leaving the catheter in place.
- Fluid drains out through the catheter. A small sample of this fluid may be sent for testing.



- If more fluid is going to be removed, the catheter will be connected to a drainage bag. This will drain the fluid using gravity.
- When the drainage is done, the catheter is taken out.
- Pressure is applied to the tap site until it has closed. Then a dressing or bandage is placed over the area.
- Your temperature, heart rate, breathing and blood pressure will be checked.
- You may feel lightheaded / dizzy after the procedure. This usually lasts only minutes. A snack can be provided.

How long does it take?

- A tap can take 1 to 3 hours.
- It is not uncommon to have large volumes of fluid removed.

How will I feel after the tap?

- You will feel more comfortable when the fluid is removed. You should find it easier to breathe, move and eat.
- The tap site may feel sore or tender.
- Usually no pain medication is required.

What happens after the tap?

- You can resume your usual activities if you feel well.
- The dressing or bandage should be left on for 24 hours. Do not bathe or shower during this time.
- Fluid can reoccur. It can even happen within a few days.

If there is leaking:

- Lay down with the tap site pointing upwards.
- Reinforce the dressing or bandage and put pressure on the site with gauze.
- Your cancer care team will provide you with extra dressing supplies in case you need to reinforce or replace the dressing or bandage.
- When the leaking has stopped, put a new bandage or dressing over the site.

When should I go to my closest emergency department?

Go to your closest emergency department if you notice any of the following symptoms:

- Fever (a temperature higher than 38 °C or 100.4 °F).
- Intense belly pain.
- Blood or pus (a thick yellow or green fluid) oozing out of the tap site (may be a sign of infection).
- More redness or tenderness in your belly.
- Difficulty stopping leakage from the tap site.

Will I need another tap?

- Fluid may build up again from your cancer and you may need another tap.
- This will be checked by your cancer care team on an ongoing basis.

Patient and family feedback is very important to us.

We would like to invite you to send any comments or suggestions on how to improve this booklet to education.cancercare@nshealth.ca or feel free to call us at 1-866-599-2267.

Looking for more health information?

Find this brochure and all our patient resources here: <http://library.nshealth.ca/cancer>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

Prepared by: Nova Scotia Health Cancer Care Program

Adapted with permission from “Preparing for Your Paracentesis” (2021), UHN Patient Education & Engagement

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If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.