



Wirral University
Teaching Hospital
NHS Foundation Trust

Gynaecological Malignant Ascites

Patient Information Leaflet

What is ascites?

- Inside the abdomen (stomach), there is a two-layer membrane which surrounds many of the body's organs
- This membrane is called the peritoneum and is shown in the picture below
- Normal peritoneum produces a small amount of fluid so that organs in the abdomen can slide smoothly over one another.
- Sometimes too much fluid can build up between the two layers, and this is called ascites (pronounced ay-site-eez).

How is ascites found?

Ascites may be found when:

- your doctor is feeling your abdomen during an examination
- a scan of your abdomen can check where the fluid is and how much is within your abdomen

What Causes Ascites?

Ascites can be caused by many conditions, such as:

- liver disease
- heart failure
- cancers:
 - breast
 - lung
 - bowel
 - stomach
 - pancreas
 - ovaries
 - womb
 - pelvic lining (peritoneum)

When cancer cells have spread to the peritoneum, these cells irritate the lining and cause more fluid to build up. Sometimes, many litres of fluid build up.

Cancer cells can also block the channels within the body's natural drainage system and so fluid can build up.

Symptoms of Ascites

The main symptom of ascites is a swollen abdomen.

Other symptoms include:

- Pain in the abdomen
- Feeling sick (nausea)
- Feeling full up after eating small amounts of food
- Reduced appetite
- Indigestion
- Tiredness
- Breathlessness
- Altered bowel habits
- Needing to wee more often

Often treatment is not needed straight away if you are able to manage your symptoms. However, if you find it difficult to cope with your symptoms, you should contact your Macmillan Specialist Nurse for support and advice. Sometimes, drainage of ascites is advised in order to confirm a diagnosis of suspected cancer (see separate leaflet about paracentesis).

Treatment of ascites

- You may get rapid relief from your symptoms by drainage of the fluid from your abdomen, which is known as 'paracentesis' (please see separate leaflet)
- Usually the fluid will return and you may need further drainage
- If you have chemotherapy (medical cancer treatment), this will reduce the volume of fluid
- and drainage should not be needed as often

Alternative treatments

Medicines known as diuretics can help to slow down the build-up of ascites, but they are rarely used. Your doctor will advise you if these are needed. If the ascites keeps building up, a permanent drain or shunt* may be considered. This is rare and your doctor or nurse will explain if this is needed for you. Shunts are used to redirect the fluid within your body, so the insertion of a drain would not be required.

Who can I contact for further help?

- Gynaecology Macmillan Specialist Nurses: 0151 607 7556

Where can I get further information?

- <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/impacts-of-cancer/ascites>
- <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/ovarian-cancer>
- <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/womb-cancer>

Name of my Consultant:.....

Name of my Macmillan Nurse Specialist
(Key Worker):.....

This leaflet is available in large print, Braille and on tape.
Please contact 0151 604 7289 if calling from outside the
Hospital and x2761 if calling from inside the Hospital.



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