Ascitic Drain Insertion

Interventional Radiology

This leaflet provides information about the procedure, what to expect on the day, the potential risks and important information for afterwards.

Prior to the procedure, you will have a telephone consultation, where you will have the opportunity to ask further questions.

Please note that this leaflet is not meant to replace discussion between you and your doctor. You should raise any questions you may have with the doctor who has referred you or with the doctor who will be performing the procedure.

What is ascitic drain insertion?

An ascitic drain insertion is a procedure used to remove excess fluid (ascites) from the abdomen.

Ascites can build up due to several conditions, including liver disease or cancer and may cause abdominal swelling, discomfort and difficulty breathing.

During the procedure, a small tube (drain) is inserted through the skin into the abdomen to allow the fluid to drain safely. The procedure is usually performed using ultrasound guidance to ensure accurate placement.

Why do I need an ascitic drain?

You may be offered this procedure if you have a build-up of fluid in your abdomen causing symptoms such as:

- Abdominal swelling or discomfort
- Shortness of breath
- Reduced appetite
- Difficulty moving or carrying out daily activities

Removing the fluid can help relieve these symptoms and improve comfort.

Tel: 01932 723470 **Email:** asp-tr.ir-referrals@nhs.net

How do I prepare for ascitic drain insertion?

You will have a pre-assessment telephone consultation with a nurse before your admission and may be asked to have blood tests before the procedure.

You can usually eat and drink normally, unless you are advised otherwise.

As it's a day case procedure, you need to arrange for an adult to collect you from the department and someone to stay overnight with you.

The procedure will take place in the Interventional Radiology (IR), within the Radiology Department at St. Peter's Hospital. When you arrive, you will be given a hospital gown to change into, and a nurse will insert an IV cannula.

A member of staff will discuss the procedure with you; answer any questions you may have and ask you to sign a consent form if you are happy to proceed.

The procedure will likely be performed under local anaesthetic.

If you are feeling unwell closer to the day of the procedure, please let the team know.

How is ascitic drain insertion performed?

You will usually lie on a bed in a comfortable position.

Ultrasound is used to identify a safe area for drain insertion. The skin is cleaned and numbed with local anaesthetic.

A small incision is made, and a thin tube (drain) is inserted into the abdomen. The fluid is then allowed to drain into a collection bag.

The drain may remain in place for several hours to allow a large volume of fluid to be removed safely.

At the end of the drainage, the tube is removed and a dressing is applied.

What are the potential risks and complications of ascitic drain insertion?

Ascitic drain insertion is a commonly performed and generally safe procedure. However, as with all medical procedures, there are some risks:

Pain or discomfort

- Mild discomfort at the insertion site is common (up to 20-30%)
- Usually short-lived and managed with simple pain relief

Bleeding

- Minor bleeding or bruising can occur (up to 5-10%)
- Significant bleeding is uncommon (<1-2%)

Infection

- Infection at the drain site or within the abdomen occurs in approximately 1-2% of patients
- May require antibiotics

Leakage of fluid

- Leakage from the drain site after removal can occur in up to 5-10% of patients
- Usually settles with simple dressings

Low blood pressure (hypotension)

- Can occur during or after drainage, particularly if large volumes are removed (up to 5-10%)
- You will be monitored closely during the procedure

Kidney function changes

- Rare (<1-2%), more likely if large volumes are drained
- May require monitoring and treatment

Injury to surrounding organs

- Very rare (<1%), due to ultrasound guidance

Failure to drain fluid

- Occasionally, it may not be possible to drain the fluid effectively

What happens afterwards?

After the procedure, you will be monitored in a recovery area or ward.

- Your blood pressure, pulse, and comfort will be monitored
- The amount of fluid drained will be recorded
- You may receive intravenous fluids or albumin if large volumes are removed

Most patients can go home the same day once drainage is complete and observations are stable.

You should:

- Rest for the remainder of the day
- Keep the dressing clean and dry
- Avoid strenuous activity for 24-48 hours

Seek urgent medical advice if you experience:

- Increasing abdominal pain
- Fever or signs of infection
- Persistent leakage from the drain site
- Dizziness or feeling faint

Follow-up will be arranged with your referring team depending on your underlying condition.

Further Information

We endeavour to provide an excellent service at all times, but should you have any concerns please, in the first instance, raise these with the Matron, Senior Nurse or Manager on duty. If they cannot resolve your concern, please contact our Patient Experience Team on 01932 723553 or email asp-tr.patient.advice@nhs.net. If you remain concerned, the team can also advise upon how to make a formal complaint.

Author: Cathie Tenreiro - IR Clinical Specialist Nurse **Department:** Imaging
Version: 1 **Published:** April 2026 **Review:** April 2029

Interventional Radiology

St Peter's Hospital

Tel: 01932 723470

Email: asp-tr.ir-referrals@nhs.net

We can provide interpreters for a variety of languages, information in larger print or other formats (e.g. audio) - please call us on 01932 723553.

You can use Text Relay to turn telephone communications into text. Use the Relay UK app on your phone, tablet or PC. You can also use Relay UK via Minicom or Uniphone.

اگر نیاز به ترجمه دارید، لطفا با شماره 01932 723553 تماس بگیرید.

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਤਰਜਮੇ ਦੀ ਲੋੜ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਇਸ ਨੰਬਰ ਤੇ ਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ: 01932 723553

اگر آپ اس کا اردو زبان میں ترجمہ چاہتے ہیں، تو براہ کرم اس فون نمبر 01932 723553 پر رابطہ کریں

Se precisa de uma tradução por favor contacte: 01932 723553

আপনার অনুবাদের দরকার হলে এখানে যোগাযোগ করুন : 01932 723553

यदि आपको अनुवाद की ज़रूरत है तो कृपया इस नंबर पर फोन करें: 01932 723553

Jeżeli chcemy, aby te informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić 01932 723553

Ashford Hospital London Road, Ashford, Middlesex, TW15 3AA Tel: **01784 884488**
St. Peter's Hospital Guildford Road, Chertsey, Surrey, KT16 0PZ Tel: **01932 872000**
Website: **www.ashfordstpeters.nhs.uk**