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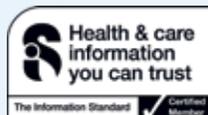
# ASCITES

**Reviewed By: Karen Lord**

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## MESOTHELIOMA UK

**Supporting People With This Asbestos Cancer**



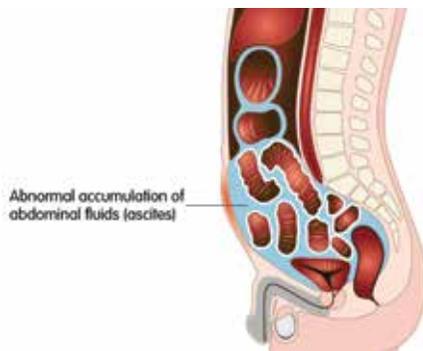
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### What causes ascites?

Inside the abdomen is a membrane called the peritoneum, which has two layers, the inner (visceral) layer next to the abdominal organs and the outer (parietal) layer lining the abdominal wall.

The peritoneum produces a fluid that acts as a lubricant and allows the abdominal organs to glide smoothly over one another. Peritoneal mesothelioma causes the peritoneum to thicken and fluid collects in the abdomen causing it to swell. This is called ascites.



### Symptoms

The symptoms of ascites can be distressing. The abdomen may become very swollen and distended, which can be uncomfortable or painful. It can also cause difficulty in getting comfortable, sitting up or walking. It can make you feel tired (lethargic) and breathless. It may cause you to feel nauseous or may make you physically sick. It may make you suffer from indigestion and you may lose your appetite.

### Drainage

In order to relieve symptoms, the treatment of ascites involves slowing the build-up of the fluid and putting a tube into the abdomen to drain it (known as paracentesis).

The ascitic tube (drain) is usually inserted by a doctor and the procedure can be done in the ward or in the clinic. Sometimes

the drain is put in while you are having an ultrasound scan. The ultrasound scan helps the doctor place the drain in the best position.

Once you are lying down comfortably the skin in the area where the drain is to be inserted is cleaned. The doctor will then give you an injection of local anaesthetic to numb the area and prevent the procedure from being painful.

The doctor makes a very small cut in the skin of the abdomen and inserts a thin tube. This tube is attached to another tube and drainage bag. The ascitic fluid drains out of the abdomen and collects inside the drainage bag. The drainage tube may be held in place with a couple of stitches and covered with a dressing.

The length of time that the drainage tube needs to stay in place depends on the amount

of fluid that needs to be drained off. Sometimes a small amount of fluid can be drained in the clinic. If there is a large amount of fluid however, the procedure may need to be carried out in hospital under the supervision of the doctors and nurses and the drain may stay in place for a period of 2–3 days.

It is possible for the ascites to build up again and drainage may need to be carried out more than once.

If the fluid becomes very troublesome and builds up on a regular basis, it may be possible to insert a permanent drainage tube under the skin of your abdomen which will stay in place indefinitely. This is only done in some hospitals and it may be worth talking to your doctor to see if it is possible for this to be done at a centre near you.