



Ultrasound-guided drainage

This leaflet tells you about the procedure known as ultrasound-guided drainage, explains what is involved and what the possible risks are.

If your procedure is pre-planned, you should have plenty of time to discuss the situation with your doctor and the radiologist (X-ray doctor), who will be doing the drainage. It is more likely that you will need a drainage quite urgently. However, you should have a good explanation of the procedure before you sign the consent form. If you are not already in hospital, you will be admitted to a ward before this procedure and will usually have to stay in hospital overnight.

What is ultrasound-guided drainage?

Your doctor is concerned that you have an area of fluid that should not be there, called a collection. These collections usually appear in the chest or in the abdomen (tummy). Using the ultrasound machine to guide him, a radiologist will insert a tube or a drain through your skin into the fluid. This tube will allow the fluid to drain into a bag and be removed from your body.

Why do I need ultrasound-guided drainage?

Other tests that you have probably had, such as an ultrasound or CT scan, will have shown that you have a collection and that it is suitable for draining through a small tube, rather than by an open operation. Once this fluid has been removed, you should feel more comfortable. Sometimes a sample of the fluid that has been removed will be sent to the laboratory for testing, which means we can diagnose and treat your symptoms more effectively.

Are there any risks or complications?

Ultrasound guided drainage is a safe procedure, but there are a few risks or complications that can arise. Perhaps the biggest problem is being unable to place the drainage tube satisfactorily in the collection.

There is a small risk that the site where the drain enters your skin may become infected. This may need treating with antibiotics. Sometimes there is some bleeding from around the site, and if this is severe, may require a blood transfusion. Occasionally, the drain may fall out, it may not be in the best place for the collection to drain properly, or the fluid may collect again after it has been drained. In these circumstances, the procedure may have to be repeated.

How do I prepare for ultrasound-guided drainage?

You need to be an inpatient in the hospital. You may need to have a blood test to check how well your blood will clot to make sure you do not bleed after the procedure.

What actually happens during ultrasound guided drainage?

You will lie on your bed or on the scanning table in the position that the radiologist has decided is most suitable. The radiologist will keep everything as sterile as possible and may wear a theatre gown and operating gloves. Your skin will be cleaned with antiseptic and then most of your body will be covered with a theatre towel. The radiologist will use the ultrasound machine to decide on the most suitable point for inserting the drainage catheter. Your skin will be numbed with local anaesthetic and the plastic drainage catheter will be inserted through your skin into the collection. The drain will be held in place by a special dressing and a drainage bag will be attached.

Will it hurt?

When the local anaesthetic is injected it will sting at first, but this soon wears off and the skin and deeper tissues should then feel numb. There will be a nurse or another member of the clinical staff standing next to you and looking after you. If the procedure does become painful, extra pain relief can be given.

Ultrasound-guided drainage (continued)

How long will it take?

Every patient's situation is different and it is not always easy to predict how long it will take. It will usually take between 20 and 40 minutes. As a guide, expect to be in the X-ray department for about an hour altogether.

What happens afterwards?

You will be taken back to your ward. Nurses on the ward will carry out routine observations, such as taking your pulse, blood pressure, and temperature to make sure that there are no problems. You will generally stay in bed for a few hours until you have recovered, and will usually have to stay in hospital overnight. It is important that you try and take care of the bag and drain. You should try not to make any sudden movements and make sure that the bag can move freely with you. It may need to be emptied occasionally so that it does not become too heavy, but the nurses will want to measure the amount in it each time.

How long will the drainage tube stay in and what happens next?

These are questions that only the doctors looking after you can answer. You may only need to stay in a short time. It is possible that you will need further scans or X-rays to check that the collection has been drained satisfactorily. You will be able to lead a normal life with the drain in place. When the drain is removed, it will not hurt.

Who should I contact if I have any questions?

If you have any questions about the information in this leaflet or about the procedure itself, please ask the nurse that is looking after you. We will do our best to make your visit to Medical Imaging as pleasant as possible.