



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

About Your Thoracentesis

This information describes your thoracentesis (THOR-uh-sen-TEE-sis) procedure and what to expect before, during and, after your procedure.

Thoracentesis is a procedure that takes out fluid from the space between your chest wall and lung. This space is called the pleural cavity. The procedure can be done to relieve shortness of breath caused by the fluid. It may also be done to take a sample of the fluid for testing if your healthcare provider requests it.

Before Your Procedure

Your healthcare provider will tell you if you can eat food, drink liquids, and take your medication as usual. You will get a phone call the day before your procedure to confirm your appointment time. If you don't get a call by 12:00 p.m., call the location where you're scheduled to have your procedure.

Read the resource *Instructions for Pulmonary Procedures at Memorial Hospital* (www.mskcc.org/pe/pulmonary-procedures-memorial-hospital) for more information about your procedure.

Where to go

Your procedure will take place at one of these locations:

Endoscopy Suite at Memorial Hospital (MSK's main hospital)

1275 York Avenue (between East 67th and East 68th Streets)

New York, NY 10065

Take the B elevator to the 2nd floor. Turn right and enter the Endoscopy/Surgical Day Hospital Suite through the glass doors.

MSK Monmouth

480 Red Hill Road

Middletown, NJ 07748

During Your Procedure

You will be sitting or lying on your side during the procedure. Your nurse will monitor your oxygen level and heart rate. Your healthcare provider may use an ultrasound (an imaging test that uses sound waves to create pictures of your internal organs) to locate where the fluid in your pleural cavity is. Once it's located, your healthcare provider will put a cool antibacterial liquid to this area to prevent infection. Then, your healthcare provider will give you an injection (shot) in this area of a local anesthetic (medication to make an area numb).

Next, your healthcare provider will insert a needle through the numbed area into your pleural cavity. You may be asked to breathe out or hold your breath at different times during the procedure. You may feel like you need to cough but it's important to try not to move while the needle is in place.

Once the needle is in the fluid, a catheter (thin, flexible tube) will be placed through it, and the needle will be taken out. Then suction or vacuum bottles will be used to help take the fluid out of your body.

You may feel discomfort or pain in your shoulder or the area where the needle was inserted. This might happen toward the end of your procedure. It should go away when the procedure is finished, and you shouldn't need medication for it. Let your healthcare provider know if you feel a lot of pain and they may pause the procedure.

After Your Procedure

You will most likely stay in the procedure or exam room until all of the fluid has drained, or if your healthcare provider feels like enough has drained. Your healthcare provider will remove the catheter when this is done. You won't go home with this catheter.

Coughing after the thoracentesis procedure is normal. It's how your body helps your lung expand again. It should stop after about an hour.

When your catheter is removed, a bandage (Band-Aid®) will be placed over the area. You may have a small amount of fluid leaking from the site. Your nurse will give you extra gauze to put over your bandage to protect your clothing in case this happens.

Once the thoracentesis is done, you will have a chest x-ray. This is to make sure that all the fluid was taken out and that your lungs are working the way they should be. You will be able to go home after your x-ray is done.

Caring for yourself at home

You may have some side effects after your procedure. These can include:

- Discomfort in the area where the needle was inserted. If this pain gets worse, call your healthcare provider.
- Pressure in your chest
- Coughing

You may still have fluid leakage for up to 72 hours (3 days) after your procedure.

If you don't have leakage, you can take the bandage off in 24 hours. During this time, you must keep the bandage dry.

If you do have leakage, apply the extra gauze with a bandage over it. If leakage continues for more than 72 hours, call your healthcare provider.

You may go back to your normal activities after the procedure.

The fluid taken from your pleural cavity may be sent to the lab for testing. The results of these tests are usually ready in 4 to 5 weekdays. The healthcare provider that asked for you to have the procedure will review your results with you.

Call Your Healthcare Provider if You Have:

- Serious or increased trouble breathing
- Increase in shortness of breath
- Chest pain or pressure that doesn't go away
- Increased pain or redness where the needle was placed
- Fluid leakage for more than 72 hours
- A fever of 101° F (38.3° C) or higher
- Shaking or shivering

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

About Your Thoracentesis - Last updated on February 15, 2021

All rights owned and reserved by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center