Information for patients undergoing a percutaneous aspiration

This leaflet has been designed to answer some of the common questions you may have about your percutaneous aspiration. Please make sure you feel you have received enough information about the procedure before choosing to sign the consent form.

What is a percutaneous aspiration?

Percutaneous aspiration is a way of removing fluid using a needle, through a tiny incision in the skin, so that it can be examined by a pathologist. The procedure is called “percutaneous” as it is done through the skin.

The radiologist undertaking the procedure will use either an ultrasound machine or a CT scanner to guide the needle into the correct place.

Why do I need a percutaneous aspiration?

Other tests have demonstrated a collection of fluid. It may not be possible to determine what the fluid is from the previous tests.

Who will be doing the percutaneous aspiration?

The doctors responsible for your care will have discussed the situation with the radiology department and together they feel that a percutaneous aspiration of fluid is the best thing to do.

A radiologist will perform the procedure. The radiologist has special expertise in using scanning equipment (CT and ultrasound) and in interpreting the images produced. They will look at these images whilst performing the aspiration.

Preparation for a percutaneous aspiration

The procedure will take place either in the CT or in the ultrasound department (part of the radiology department). Your aspiration can either be undertaken as an inpatient or outpatient.

You may have some blood tests prior to the aspiration to check you do not have an increased risk of bleeding. If you are taking any blood thinning medications, like warfarin, you should inform your doctor before the procedure. If you have any allergies you must inform your doctor. If you have previously reacted to contrast medium (the dye used for CT imaging) you must tell your doctor about this too.

You will be asked to sign a consent form before the aspiration is undertaken.
What happens during a percutaneous aspiration?
On arrival at the x ray department, you may be asked to change into a hospital gown, depending upon the site of the drainage. You will then be asked to lie on the CT scanner table or ultrasound examination table in the position that the radiologist has decided is most suitable.

Your skin will be cleaned with antiseptic, and you may have some of your body covered with a sterile sheet. The radiologist will use the ultrasound machine or the CT scanner to decide on the most suitable point for inserting the needle. Your skin will then be anaesthetised, using an injection of local anaesthetic, similar to that used at the dentist. The local anaesthetic will sting to start with, but this will soon pass as the skin and deeper tissues become numb. A drainage needle will then be inserted into the fluid collection and a sample of the fluid removed through the needle.

How long does a percutaneous aspiration take?
This will depend on the site of the fluid collection. The procedure may take up to 30 minutes, although you will be in the department for a longer period.

What happens after a percutaneous aspiration?
Depending on the type of aspiration you may be asked to stay in bed for a few hours until you have recovered. A nurse will then carry out routine observations, such as taking your pulse and blood pressure, to make sure there are no problems. If you have any pain following the procedure, we may give you some analgesia. For certain types of drainage you may have to have to stay in hospital overnight. You will be told prior to arrival if an overnight stay will be required.

We recommend you do not undertake strenuous activity and rest for the remainder of the day.

Can I drive home afterwards?
No, we recommend that you do not drive for 24 hours and you should ask a friend or relative to drive you home following your procedure.

Possible problems
Percutaneous aspirations are safe procedures; however, there are a few risks or complications that may arise. The radiologist undertaking your aspiration will explain the procedure and any potential complications before asking you to sign a consent form.

What do I do if I feel unwell after I have gone home?
If you feel unwell after your procedure, you should seek medical advice from your GP/hospital doctor or through the emergency department and inform them that you have had an aspiration procedure.

Further information or comments
If you have any comments or feedback regarding the procedure or this information leaflet then please do not hesitate to contact the x ray department.
Privacy and dignity
We are committed to treating all patients with privacy and dignity in a safe, clean and comfortable environment. This means, with a few exceptions, we will care for you in same sex bays in areas with separate sanitary facilities for men and women. In some areas, due to the nature of the equipment or specialist care involved, we may not be able to care for you in same sex bays. In these cases staff will always do their best to respect your privacy and dignity, eg with the use of curtains or, where possible, moving you next to a patient of the same sex. If you have any concerns, please speak to a member of the radiology team, ward sister or charge nurse.

We are now a smoke-free site: smoking will not be allowed anywhere on the hospital site. For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169.

Other formats: If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio, please ask the department where you are being treated, to contact the patient information team: patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk.

Please note: We do not currently hold many leaflets in other languages; written translation requests are funded and agreed by the department who has authored the leaflet.

Document history
Authors Dr S S UPPONI
Department Radiology, Box 218, Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 0QQ www.cuh.org.uk
Contact number 01223 216032
Publish/Review date August 2015/August 2018
File name Information_for_patients_undergoing_a_percutaneous_aspiration
Version number/Ref 1/PIN3764