

# Ascites (fluid in the lining of the tummy)

This information is about [ascites](#). Ascites is a build-up of fluid in the lining of the tummy (abdomen). Inside the tummy (abdomen) there is a membrane called the peritoneum. It has 2 layers. One of the layers lines the tummy wall. This is called the parietal peritoneum. The other layer covers the organs inside the tummy. This is called the visceral peritoneum.

The peritoneum makes a fluid, which acts as a lubricant between these 2 layers. This allows the organs to glide smoothly over each another. Sometimes this fluid can build up between the 2 layers. This is called ascites.

Ascites may develop when cancer cells irritate the lining of the tummy, causing it to make too much fluid. Or when [lymph nodes](#) in the tummy become blocked and the fluid cannot drain properly. It can also develop if cancer has spread to the liver or the liver is damaged.

The main symptom of ascites is bloating and a swollen tummy. Other symptoms include:

- discomfort or pain in the tummy
- feeling sick (nausea) or indigestion
- loss of appetite or feeling full after eating a small amount
- breathlessness
- tiredness and weakness (fatigue)
- constipation
- needing to pee (pass urine) more often.

## How ascites can be managed

- Ascites is usually managed by draining the fluid. The procedure is called ascitic drainage or paracentesis. It is done by putting a tube (catheter) into the tummy to drain the fluid. This relieves the symptoms and helps you feel more comfortable. You usually have this treatment as a day patient. Most people do not have any serious problems from having an ascitic drain.
- The fluid may build up again. You may need to have it drained more than once. Sometimes doctors suggest putting in a catheter that stays in place long-term.
- Some people might have a tube called a peritoneovenous shunt placed inside the tummy. It drains the fluid directly into a large vein. It stays in permanently. You need to be quite fit to have this procedure. You will be given either a sedative (which makes you drowsy) or a general anaesthetic before the doctor puts the shunt in.
- Cancer treatments such as [chemotherapy](#) can help reduce the number of cancer cells. This can sometimes improve ascites.
- Your doctor may give you a water tablet (diuretic). It may help the body get rid of excess fluid as pee (urine) and can help slow down the build-up of fluid. They may also suggest reducing the amount of salt in your diet.

## Macmillan Cancer Support resources

We have more information on our [website](#), including audiobooks. Or you can order our free booklets and leaflets on [orders.macmillan.org.uk](https://orders.macmillan.org.uk) such as:

- MAC11671 [Managing the symptoms of cancer](#)
- MAC11630 [Understanding secondary cancer of the liver](#) (PDF-only)
- MAC11917 [Understanding primary liver cancer](#)

We produce information in a [range of formats](#) and [languages](#). To order these, visit our website or call our support line on **0808 808 00 00**.

## Further Macmillan support

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. Or visit [macmillan.org.uk](https://macmillan.org.uk) to [chat online](#) to one of our team.

Deaf or hard of hearing? Call using Relay UK on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the [Relay UK app](#). Speak another language? Telephone interpreters are available. Please tell us in English the language you would like to use.

If you want to share your experiences or ask questions, you can find others who understand on our [Online Community](#). Our free [Macmillan Buddy service](#) can arrange weekly calls with a friendly volunteer who understands what you're going through.

## Other useful contact details

- The British Liver Trust – visit [www.britishlivertrust.org.uk](https://www.britishlivertrust.org.uk) or call **0800 652 7330**

## Notes and questions

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