

Swelling tummy (ascites)

Inside the tummy (abdomen), there is a membrane called the peritoneum. It has two layers. One of the layers lines the tummy wall. The other layer covers the organs inside the tummy. Sometimes fluid can build up between the two layers. This is called ascites.

Ascites can develop if cancer cells are irritating the lining of the tummy or if the liver is damaged. You may also get swelling if lymph nodes in the tummy have become blocked.

Ascites causes swelling in the tummy. It can also cause:

- pain and discomfort
- feelings of sickness (nausea)
- indigestion and constipation
- tiredness
- breathlessness
- a reduced appetite
- difficulty moving around or sitting comfortably.

How ascites can be managed

- If you have swelling in your tummy, talk to your cancer doctor or nurse. They will arrange tests to find the cause and talk about the best way to manage it.
- Your doctor may suggest putting a tube (catheter) into the tummy to drain the extra fluid. This is called ascitic drainage. The fluid is drained over a few hours and you may have to stay in hospital overnight.
- The catheter can become blocked. Changing your position or sitting upright may help clear it.
- Tell the nurse or doctor if you have any pain or discomfort. They can give you painkillers.
- Fluid can build up again, so you may need to have it drained more than once.
- Cancer treatments like chemotherapy and targeted therapies can help reduce the number of cancer cells. This can sometimes improve ascites.
- Your doctor might give you a water tablet (diuretic). It may help the body get rid of excess fluid as pee (urine). This can help slow down the build-up of fluid.
- Occasionally, a doctor can put a tube called a shunt inside the tummy. It drains the fluid into a large vein. Before they put the shunt in, they use a sedative, which makes you drowsy. They might also use a general anaesthetic.

Local resources:

Resource	Contact details

National resource:

Resource	Contact details
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> British Liver Trust 	<p>www.britishlivertrust.org.uk</p> <p>Tel 0800 652 7330</p>

Further information

www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/side-effects-and-symptoms/other-side-effects/ascites

Our booklets and leaflets are available to order free on be.macmillan.org.uk

- **Managing the symptoms of cancer**
- **Understanding secondary cancer in the liver**

More information and support

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm, or visit macmillan.org.uk

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

We produce information in a range of formats and languages. To order these, visit macmillan.org.uk/otherformats or call our support line.

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