

**Patient
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Amniocentesis

Introduction

This leaflet gives you information about amniocentesis. You may feel concerned about having an amniocentesis, so we would like you to know what to expect during and after the procedure.

What is amniocentesis?

Amniocentesis is a diagnostic test carried out during pregnancy. The test involves using a fine needle to remove a small amount of the amniotic fluid around your baby.

Amniocentesis is used to detect chromosomal abnormalities in unborn babies such as Down's syndrome. Amniocentesis can also detect certain other genetic conditions, such as sickle cell disease or thalassaemia major. Please note amniocentesis does not necessarily identify all minor chromosomal abnormalities or mosaicism -- a rare form of Down's syndrome where some cells have the normal number of chromosomes but other cells have an extra chromosome.

Amniocentesis does not screen for neural tube defects such as spina bifida (a malformation with the spine).

Who is offered the test?

Amniocentesis is offered:

- when there is a family history of a chromosomal or inherited disorder or abnormality in the woman's or her partner's family, or in a previous pregnancy
- if the Down's screening test shows an increased risk of a Down's syndrome baby
- to women where a fetal abnormality has been suspected or identified on ultrasound screening.

When can the test be performed?

Amniocentesis is usually performed around the 15th week of pregnancy, but the test may be carried out later in the pregnancy if necessary.

Reference No.

GHPI0654_01_17

Department

Maternity

Review due

January 2020

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What are the risks of amniocentesis?

Amniocentesis has been done for many years and we have a lot of information about its safety and accuracy. Having the procedure is known to cause miscarriage in 1 in 100 women. Research has shown that if a miscarriage does happen, it is usually because the amniotic sac (bag of fluid) which surrounds the baby breaks or becomes infected.

Can I do anything to prevent a miscarriage after I have had an amniocentesis?

There is nothing you can do to prevent a miscarriage after an amniocentesis. It is advisable that you take it easy the day after the procedure and that you should avoid sex and any heavy lifting or strenuous exercise. However, there is no evidence to suggest that this helps.

How is the amniocentesis done?

Amniocentesis is an outpatient test which is performed in the Maternity Ultrasound Department. **Please come to the department with a full bladder.**

An ultrasound scan is performed first to check the position of the baby and placenta and to identify a site where we can collect the fluid. The doctor will then clean the skin with antiseptic fluid and a small injection of local anaesthetic may be given to numb the area. A fine needle is then passed through your skin into the uterus (womb) using the ultrasound as guidance. A sample of the fluid surrounding the baby is removed (approximately 3 to 4 teaspoons) with a syringe. This fluid is sent to the laboratory for testing. Occasionally the fluid taken from around the baby may contain a few of your blood cells, whilst this is nothing to worry about, if this does happen, a blood test will need to be taken from you to identify and exclude your cells from the fluid sample. It is possible during this test that some of the baby's cells can mix with yours. This is only a problem if your blood group is rhesus negative. If your blood group is rhesus negative it is recommended that you have an Anti-D injection, immediately following the amniocentesis. Anti-D prevents your body producing a reaction to your unborn baby's blood if its blood group is different to yours.

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Please note that occasionally, amniocentesis cannot be done due to the position of the baby. If this happens, the doctor will arrange an appointment for you to have the test on another day.

The procedure will be explained to you again in detail on the day of the test and your consent for the procedure will be requested before this test is performed. Your partner is welcome to be with you during the test if you wish.

Is amniocentesis painful?

Although you are aware that the test is taking place, most women say that the test is uncomfortable rather than painful. Most women feel it is no more painful than an injection or blood test. You may notice some slight cramping for a few hours afterwards, this is normal. You can take paracetamol for any discomfort but please remember not to take more than 8 tablets in 24 hours.

What happens afterwards?

Removing the sample of fluid takes just a few minutes. If you wish you will be shown your baby on the scan following the procedure. If you prefer not to see the baby on the screen, please inform the doctor or sonographer before the scan.

If you experience any unusual symptoms immediately after the test or over the next few days, for example, if you have flu like symptoms (shivery, raised temperature), leak water or blood vaginally or have contractions you should call the maternity triage department (number at the end of this leaflet).

When do I get the results?

The result, which is called the Quantitative Fluorescence-Polymerase Chain Reaction (QF-PCR) test, should be available within 3 working days. We will telephone you with the results unless you request otherwise. This test looks at 3 chromosomes that are the cause of Down's, Edward's or Patau's syndrome (the most common of the chromosomal abnormalities). The sex of your baby will also be available if you wish to know.

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For most women, the test will give a definite 'yes' or 'no' answer to whether your baby has the chromosomal abnormality the test was looking for.

Very occasionally, the test does not give a clear result. This is rare but if it happens, your doctor or midwife may offer you a different test.

Also very occasionally the test needs to be repeated, if this happens we will notify you as soon as possible and arrange another appointment.

What if the results are abnormal?

This does not happen very often, but if the results show that the baby has a chromosomal abnormality, your doctor or midwife will talk to you in detail about this and how your baby is likely to be affected.

You might choose to:

- continue with your pregnancy and use the information you have gained from the test results to help you prepare for the birth and care of your baby
- end your pregnancy (have a termination).

You will be supported by the doctors and midwives in whatever decisions you make. Other specialised support organisations are also there to support you in making and coming to terms with these decisions.

Contact information

If you have any further questions or concerns regarding amniocentesis please contact one of the screening midwives on the number provided below.

Antenatal Clinic

Gloucestershire Royal Hospital

Tel: 0300 422 6106

Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 4:00pm

Cheltenham General Hospital

Tel: 0300 422 2415

Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 4:00pm

Maternity Advice Line/Triage

Tel: 0300 4225541

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Further information

The Downs Syndrome Association Helpline

Tel: 0845 230 0372

Monday to Friday 10:00am to 4:00pm

Website: www.downs--syndrome.org.uk

Email: info@downs--syndrome.org.uk

Antenatal Results and Choices (A.R.C) Helpline

Tel: 08450 772 290

Monday to Friday 10:00am to 5:00pm

Website: www.arc--uk.org

Email: info@arc--uk.org

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