Pericardiocentesis (Pericardial Tap)

Information for patients and families

Read this booklet to learn:

• what a pericardiocentesis is
• why you need this procedure
• what to expect
• who to talk to if you have any questions

What is a pericardiocentesis?

Pericardiocentesis (also called pericardial tap) is a safe procedure. It removes extra fluid that has built up in the sac around your heart. This extra fluid is also called pericardial effusion.

Healthy Heart
Pericardium: A fluid filled sac that surrounds the heart

Heart with a Pericardial effusion:
An abnormal amount of fluid in the pericardium
Why do I need to have this procedure?
The extra fluid around your heart can:

- make it difficult for you to breathe
- make it difficult for your heart to beat properly
- make you feel uncomfortable

Your doctor will remove this extra fluid to help you breathe better, make your heart work better, and make you feel more comfortable.

What can I expect?

Before the pericardiocentesis:

- You usually have a pericardiocentesis in our procedure room or at your bedside. You lie on your back for this procedure.

- Your doctor does a special ultrasound of your heart to see how much fluid is around your heart. This helps them decide if you need to have this procedure.

- If you need to have the procedure, your doctor explains it to you and your family and tells you the reasons why a pericardiocentesis is right for you. This is a good time to ask any questions you may have.

- When you are sure you understand why you need the procedure and feel comfortable about having it, we ask you to sign a consent form. This form says you agree to have the procedure.

During the pericardiocentesis:

1. We clean the area of your chest just beneath the breast bone with a special liquid.

2. Your doctor numbs (freezes) the area using special medicine. Some patients feel anxious or worried about this procedure. Tell your doctor if you feel anxious and would like medicine to relax you.

3. We cover the area with a sterile (very clean) towel, so it is important to keep your hands at your sides.
4. Your doctor puts a plastic tube (drain) into the area around your heart where the fluid is. You will feel some pressure when the tube is going in, but it should not hurt. If you feel pain, tell your doctor. They can give you more numbing medicine.

5. Once the drain is in the right place, your doctor will use a syringe to remove some of the fluid from around your heart.

6. We send samples of the fluid to the laboratory for testing. This will help us find out what caused the fluid to collect around your heart.

7. We connect the drain to a collection bag so the remaining fluid can drain slowly. The tube is held in place with stitches, and we place a dressing over the area.

What can I expect after the procedure?

- You should start feeling better once some of the fluid is removed from around your heart.

- The drain is left in place for 1 or 2 days. You may have pain at the area once the numbing wears off. If you have pain, tell your nurse. They can give you medicine to take the pain away.

- Don’t touch or tug at your dressing or drain. Ask your nurse if you need help when moving in bed. Keep the dressing dry at all times.

- Once the fluid stops draining into the collection bag, your doctor does another ultrasound of your heart to make sure all the fluid is gone.

- If there is no more fluid, your doctor removes the drain and covers the area with a small dressing.

- There will be a tiny hole in your chest area when we take the drain out. This will heal on its own.

Who can I talk to if I have any questions?

Your safety and comfort is important to us. Please let your doctor and nurse know how you are feeling and if you have any questions.