



Education

Laparoscopy for Peritoneal Fluid

What is a laparoscopy?

A laparoscopy is a procedure in which your health care provider uses a laparoscope to look at the organs and tissues inside your peritoneal cavity. A laparoscope is a thin, lighted tube. The peritoneal cavity is the space that holds most of your abdominal and pelvic organs.

When is it used?

Your peritoneal cavity may have too much fluid.

Your health care provider will perform this procedure to better understand your abdominal problems.

Examples of alternatives to this procedure include:

- trying other procedures, such as open abdominal surgery (using a larger incision that the surgeon can work through)
- having an ultrasound, which is a scan with high-frequency sound waves that shows a picture of the inside of your abdomen on a screen
- having a CT scan of the abdomen, which is an x-ray scan of your abdomen
- choosing not to have the procedure, recognizing the risks of not having the information it might provide.

You should ask your provider about these choices.

How do I prepare for a laparoscopy?

Plan for your care and recovery after the operation. Arrange for someone to drive you home after the procedure. Allow for time to rest and try to find other people to help you with your day-to-day duties.

Follow your provider's instructions about not smoking before and after the procedure. Smokers heal more slowly after surgery. They are also more likely to have breathing problems during surgery. For this reason, if you are a smoker, you should quit at least 2 weeks before the procedure. It is best to quit 6 to 8 weeks before surgery. Also, your wounds will heal much better if you do not smoke after the surgery.

Follow any other instructions provided by your health care provider. Eat a light meal, such as soup or salad, the night before the procedure. Do not eat or drink anything after midnight and the morning before the procedure. Do not even drink coffee, tea, or water.

What happens during the procedure?

You are given a general anesthetic, which relaxes your muscles, puts you to sleep, and prevents you from feeling pain.

Your peritoneal cavity is inflated with carbon dioxide gas. This expands your peritoneal cavity like a balloon and helps your health care provider see your organs. Your provider makes a small cut near the bellybutton, puts the laparoscope through this cut, and puts another tool through a second small cut in the abdomen. Your provider uses the scope to guide the other tool and look at certain organs. Abdominal fluids may be sent to the lab for analysis. If your provider finds a growth that should not be there, he or she may use the tool to take a sample of the growth for lab tests. Finally, the provider removes the scope and the tool and sews up the openings in the abdominal wall and bellybutton area.

What happens after the procedure?

You may stay in the hospital several hours or overnight to recover. The anesthetic may cause sleepiness or grogginess for a while. You may have some shoulder pain, feel bloated, or notice a change in bowel habits for a few days. You may not be able to urinate right away and may need to have a catheter (a small tube) placed into your bladder through the urethra (the tube from the bladder to the outside).

You should avoid heavy activity such as lifting. Ask your health care provider how much you should lift, what steps you should take, and when you should come back for a checkup.

What are the benefits of this procedure?

This surgical procedure may help your health care provider make a more accurate diagnosis.

What are the risks associated with this procedure?

The following complications of this procedure are rare:

- There are some risks when you have general anesthesia. Discuss these risks with your health care provider.
- The abdominal organs, glands, intestines, or blood vessels may be damaged. You may need abdominal surgery to repair them at the time of the laparoscopy.
- The lining of the abdominal wall may become inflamed.
- Fluid may continue to leak from the small cuts in your abdomen.
- You may develop an infection or bleeding.
- You may have some pain after the procedure.

You should ask your provider how these risks apply to you.

When should I call my health care provider?

Call your provider right away if:

- You develop a fever over 100°F (37.8°C).
- You develop redness, swelling, pain, or drainage around the small cuts in your abdomen.
- You become dizzy and faint.
- You have nausea and vomiting.
- You become short of breath.
- You have severe abdominal pain or swelling.

Call during office hours if:

- You have questions about the procedure or its result.
- You want to make another appointment.

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