Thoracentesis

A thoracentesis is a procedure used to remove fluid from the chest. Fluid in the chest is caused by various problems. Some of these are infection, inflammation, and other conditions such as cancer.

The fluid is removed using a needle inserted through the chest wall. It is then sent to a lab for study. Examination of the fluid can help find the cause of the fluid buildup. This procedure is also done for comfort in people with cancer. It helps by relieving the pressure. It also helps lessen pain and makes breathing easier.

PROCEDURE:

This is a procedure that can be done as an outpatient. You may have to sign a consent form prior to having the procedure. You should be present one hour prior to the procedure or as directed. The procedure will take about one half hour. This varies on the amount of fluid that must be removed. During the procedure, a portion of the chest will be prepped. This is to clean the area the needle goes in for removal of fluid. Novocaine may then be used to numb the skin and tissue where the fluid will be removed. A larger needle will be inserted into the numb area. You may develop coughing as the fluid is removed. This is normal and nothing to worry about. The fluid removed is sent to the lab. Some results may be available to you in a couple hours. You will be monitored for a period of time following the procedure. If there are no problems, you should be able to go home shortly after the procedure.

LET YOUR CAREGIVERS KNOW ABOUT THE FOLLOWING:

- Allergies
- Medications taken including herbs, eye drops, over the counter medications, and creams
- Use of steroids (by mouth or creams)
- Previous problems with anesthetics or Novocaine
- Possibility of pregnancy, if this applies
- History of blood clots (*thrombophlebitis*)
- History of bleeding or blood problems
- Previous surgery
- Other health problems

RISKS OF THIS PROCEDURE

All surgical procedures are associated with risks. Some of these are:

- Injury to the lung.
- Possibility of infection.
- Possible collapse of a lung (*pneumothorax*). A collapsed lung could mean that a tube would need to be put into the chest to keep the lung expanded. This could be in place for several days.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- You may resume normal diet and activities as allowed.
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You develop shortness of breath or chest pain.
- There is new drainage or pus coming from the site where fluid was removed.
- You notice swelling or increased redness from site where fluid was removed.
- An unexplained temperature of 100º F (37.8º C) or above develops.
- You notice blood in the urine.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You develop a rash.
- You have difficulty breathing.
- You have any allergic problems.

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