



AMNIOCENTESIS

What is amniocentesis?

Amniocentesis is a procedure in which the doctor uses a needle to remove fluid from the amniotic sac which is the thin sac filled with fluid that surrounds the baby in the uterus.

It is usually done early in pregnancy to test for certain genetic problems. Amniocentesis is sometimes done in late pregnancy to test the maturity of the baby's lungs.

When is it used?

When the test is necessary for genetic screening, it is done at about the 16th week of pregnancy.

You might be advised by your doctor to have amniocentesis in the following cases:

- If you are over age 35
- If prenatal tests show an increased likelihood of a problem with the baby
- If you have given birth to a child with Down syndrome or other genetic disorder
- If you are known to have the gene for a disorder that can be passed on to the baby
- If you have a child with a defect in the spinal cord or brain
- If either you or your husband has a strong family history of a genetic problem
- If you have had three or more miscarriages

Amniocentesis may also be done later in pregnancy to see if the baby's lungs are mature enough for the baby to breathe well after birth. This is usually done if you have a high-risk condition and the doctor needs to deliver the baby early (possibly by cesarean section or induction of labor).

It can also be done to see if you have an infection in your amniotic fluid.

How do I prepare for amniocentesis?

You may need to drink a lot of water before the procedure in order to have a full bladder, which helps the ultrasound technician in this procedure. Women with an Rh-negative pregnancy may need special preparation.

Follow any special instructions your doctor gives you.

Medical Arts Building
825 Nicollet Mall, Suite 735
Minneapolis, MN 55402
FAX: 952-806-9741

Edina Location
6565 France Ave South, Suite 200
Edina, MN 55435
FAX: 952-806-9741

Centralized Switchboard and Scheduling: 952-806-0011
www.awhpa.com



What happens during the procedure?

The baby's heart rate is monitored before and after the procedure. Your abdomen is cleaned and the skin is usually numbed. Ultrasound is used to guide the needle through your abdomen and uterus to the area where the most fluid is and away from the baby. You may feel some discomfort when the needle is inserted. A small amount of fluid is withdrawn to be sent to the lab for analysis.

You and the baby will be monitored for a brief period after the procedure. Then you can go home.

What happens after the procedure?

You should rest for 24 hours after the procedure. The results of the fluid analysis will be available in 1 to 3 weeks. Lung maturity can be determined in 1 or 2 days.

What are the benefits of the procedure?

The benefits of amniocentesis include:

- Detecting any problems in the fetus, such as Down's syndrome or other chromosomal abnormalities
- Detecting development disorders such as spina bifida
- Detection infection in the amniotic fluid
- Checking the maturity of the baby's lungs

What are the risks associated with this procedure?

The overall risk of complications from this procedure is very low. Less than 1% of women have problems. However, it is important to know what can occur. The following are possible complications of amniocentesis.

- Excessive blood loss
- Infection in the amniotic fluid
- Harm to the baby from the needle
- Harm to the placenta or cord from the needle
- Premature breaking (rupture) of the amniotic sac
- Premature labor or contractions that can cause labor
- Miscarriage (1 pregnancy is lost for every 200 genetic amniocentesis performed)

When should I call the doctor?

Call the doctor immediately if:

- You start having contractions
- You have any bloody or liquid discharge

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- You have any changes related to the pregnancy that concern you

Call the doctor during office hours if:

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

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