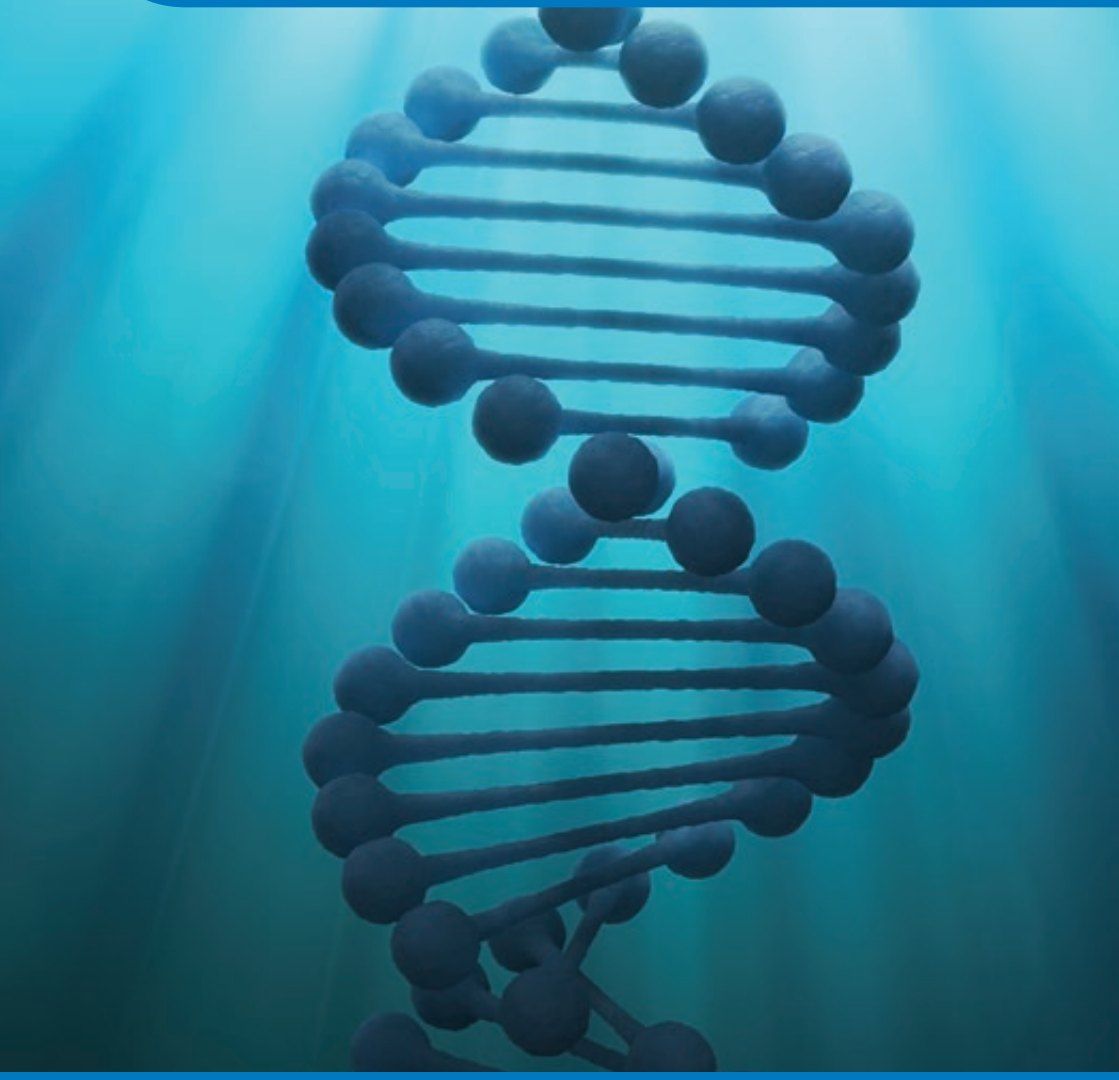
University Hospital Southampton NHS
NHS Foundation Trust

Amniocentesis

Information for patients



This leaflet tells you about the amniocentesis test. This test is not offered to everyone. It is normally used to test for Down's syndrome, the most common of the chromosomal disorders. Sometimes it may be used to test for other specific genetic disorders.

Why it is used

The final decision about having any test in pregnancy is yours. You may wish to consider amniocentesis if:

- you have a potential problem found on ultrasound scan, which may suggest chromosomal abnormality
- you have had a previous pregnancy terminated for a genetic condition.

When it is used

Amniocentesis is most safely performed after 15 weeks of pregnancy.

Risks

Amniocentesis has been available for a number of years. Every year in Britain over 15,000 women have the test performed, so we do know a lot about its safety and accuracy.

We know that the test can sometimes cause a miscarriage (loss of the pregnancy). About one in every 200 (0.5%) women who have the test will miscarry as a result of the procedure but we don't really know why this happens.

Other than this, there is no evidence that amniocentesis is harmful to your baby.

No test is absolutely perfect, but this chromosome test for Down's syndrome is very reliable. It fails to give a clear result in fewer than one in 1,000 cases. If you are having the amniocentesis for other genetic disorders, you should discuss the accuracy of the test with your genetic doctor or counsellor.

What will the test tell me?

If you are having an amniocentesis for a chromosomal disorder, all chromosomes will be looked at. This means that the test may occasionally detect a problem with the chromosomes which was not expected. If the results show anything abnormal you will be told what the abnormality is and how this will affect your baby. If you are having an amniocentesis for a single gene disorder, only this will be tested for.

How the test is performed

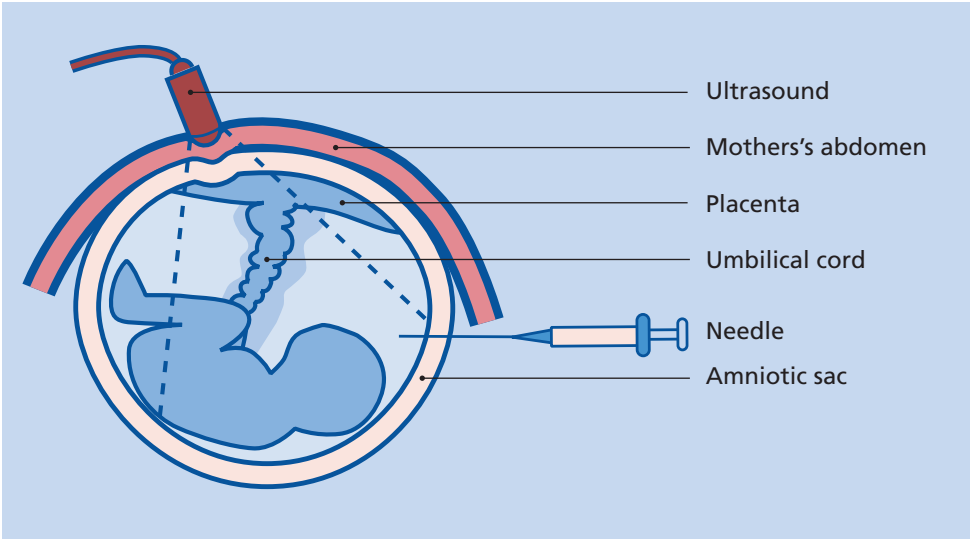
Amniocentesis involves taking a small amount of the amniotic fluid (water) that surrounds the baby in the uterus (womb). This contains cells from the baby that are tested in the laboratory.

Before the test is done, an ultrasound scan is carried out to check the baby's age in weeks, and the position of the baby and the placenta (afterbirth).

Your abdomen over the area of the womb is cleaned with antiseptic solution. A fine needle is then passed into the womb, and a sample of the fluid that surrounds the baby is removed with a syringe and sent to the laboratory. The position of the baby and the needle are monitored throughout the procedure by ultrasound. Very occasionally the doctor cannot get enough fluid at the first attempt and may need to re-insert the needle.

Is the test painful?

Most women describe the test as uncomfortable rather than painful and say it feels similar to period pain. Generally women say the thought of it is worse than the actual test.



After the test

You will probably be at the hospital for about 45 minutes, but the test itself only takes a few minutes. We encourage you to bring a companion with you for support during and after the test. It is a good idea to take things easy for a couple of days, avoiding any heavy lifting or strenuous exercise.

The 'period pain' feeling may continue for up to 48 hours. This is not unusual and should settle with paracetamol, which is safe to take in pregnancy. If you have excessive pain, are leaking any fluid, or bleeding, or develop a high temperature, please contact your midwife, GP or local hospital.

Results

The chromosome test involves growing the cells in the laboratory and this usually takes about two weeks.

We will contact you by telephone as soon as the results become available and give you an opportunity to discuss the findings. We will also notify your own hospital and GP of the results.

If the results show anything abnormal, you will be told what the abnormality is and how this could affect your baby. You will have the chance to discuss the results fully before making any decisions.

HIV infection

At the moment our laboratory facilities and current health and safety law limit the tests we can perform on an amniocentesis sample from a woman who is known to be HIV positive.

There may be a very small risk that an amniocentesis test could cause the HIV virus to be passed to the developing baby. We encourage women who are HIV positive to discuss this with their specialist midwife or doctor to obtain further information.

Your questions

When you come to your amniocentesis appointment you will have the opportunity to discuss the test fully before making a final decision on whether to go ahead. We recognise that everyone will have their own particular questions and concerns to discuss.

Further information

If you need more advice about any aspect of the amniocentesis test, please contact us at:

- **Wessex Clinical Genetics Service**
  Princess Anne Hospital
  Coxford Road
  Southampton
  SO16 5YA

  Telephone: **023 8120 6170**
  Website: **www.uhs.nhs.uk/genetics**

Notes

Notes

This booklet was written by:

Wessex Clinical Genetics Service
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If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audiotape, please telephone 023 8120 4688 for help.

www.uhs.nhs.uk/genetics

Version 4. Published May 2016. Due for review May 2019. GEN001.01