

Thoracentesis

Thoracentesis (THOR-ah-sen-TE-sis) is a procedure to remove excess fluid in the space between the lungs and the chest wall. This space is called the pleural space.

Normally, the pleural space is filled with a small amount of fluid—about 4 teaspoons full. Some conditions—such as heart failure, lung infections, and tumors—can cause more fluid to build up. When this happens, it's called a pleural effusion (PLUR-al e-FU-shun). A lot of extra fluid can press on the lungs, making it hard to breathe.

Doctors use thoracentesis to find the cause of a pleural effusion. The procedure also might be done to help you breathe easier.

During the procedure, your doctor inserts a thin needle or plastic tube into the pleural space. He or she draws out excess fluid.

Your doctor may take only the amount of fluid needed to find the cause of the pleural effusion. However, if you have a lot of fluid in your pleural space, he or she may take more. This helps the lungs expand and take in more air, which allows you to breathe easier.

After the fluid is removed from your chest, it's sent for testing. Once the cause of the pleural effusion is known, your doctor will plan treatment. For example, if an infection is causing the excess fluid, your doctor may prescribe antibiotics. If the cause is heart failure, you'll be treated for that condition.

Thoracentesis usually takes 10–15 minutes. It may take longer if you have a lot of fluid in your pleural space. You'll be watched for up to a few hours after the procedure for complications.

Location: Diagnostic Treatment Center at Dekalb Medical Center located in the main hospital building on the ground floor enters through the Emergency Room.

Arrival: Patient to arrive one hour prior to procedure to register and be clinically evaluated and prepared for the procedure.

Instruction: NPO after midnight (nothing by mouth after midnight)

Take your usual medications with the exception of diabetics on insulin or drugs that lower blood glucose.

Do not take aspirin or aspirin-containing products for 5- 7 days prior to the procedure

Special Instructions are required for patients on coumadin.

Because you will be sedated, you cannot drive after the procedure is over. You must have someone to drive you home after the procedure or it will not be performed. This is for your safety. You may not take a taxi by yourself or a bus.

Follow-up: Plan a return appointment to discuss the results one week after the procedure.