

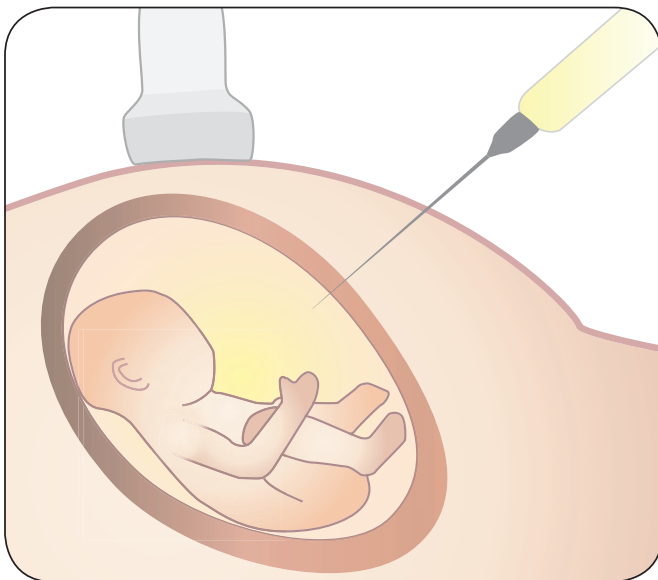
Amniocentesis



Your doctor has suggested that you have an amniocentesis, a prenatal diagnostic test. This fact sheet explains the purpose of this test and what it involves. It will also help you decide whether you want to take this test or not.

What is amniocentesis?

It involves taking a sample of amniotic fluid (in which the fetus is immersed and which contains some of the fetus' cells) from a pregnant woman. The sampling is done via ultrasound using a thin needle that passes through the abdomen and uterus.



Amniotic fluid is collected using a thin needle.

What is this test for?

Amniocentesis is suggested for any of the following reasons:

- To find out whether the fetus has trisomy 21 (Down syndrome) or another genetic defect (in the chromosomes).
- To find out whether there are any anomalies in the development of the fetus, such as a malformation of the neural tube, the part that will form the brain and spinal cord.
- To detect an infection in the amniotic fluid. Such an infection is rare. It is suspected when there is a delay in the growth of the fetus, for example.
- To know the stage of development of the baby's lungs.

Why is this test being suggested for me?

Amniocentesis is mainly performed when:

- Family members have a genetic anomaly.
- Trisomy 21 is suspected following prenatal screening. Most often, this screening is done by ultrasound and analysis of the mother's blood.
- Anomalies were detected on the 2nd trimester ultrasound.
- The pregnancy has presented certain complications.

At what point in the pregnancy is this test done?

It can be done from the 15th week of pregnancy. By then, there is enough amniotic fluid and fetal cells so that the test can be done properly and provide reliable results.

Are there any risks associated with amniocentesis?

There are two main risks:

- A risk of miscarriage. This occurs in around 1 case in 300.
- A risk, extremely rare, of infection of the uterus.

How do I decide whether to have this test or not?

The decision isn't always easy, partly because of the risks involved. Also, it's a decision made in a situation coloured by very strong emotions.

Each person reacts differently according to their background, values, and priorities. The decision to have an amniocentesis or not is yours. If you wish, talk it over with your partner or someone who is important to you.

Here are some questions to ask yourself that may help you reach your decision:

- With the information the doctor has given me, do I know the risks, advantages, and disadvantages of amniocentesis clearly?
- Why is this exam being proposed to me?
- Is there a high risk of my baby having an abnormality?
- Do I intend to terminate the pregnancy if the result of the amniocentesis shows an abnormality?
- Would I be able to accept an abortion at an advanced stage (20-22 weeks)?
- Would I be able to live with a disabled child?

There is no right or wrong decision. Take the time to consult, reflect, discuss it with your partner or a relative, and respect yourself.

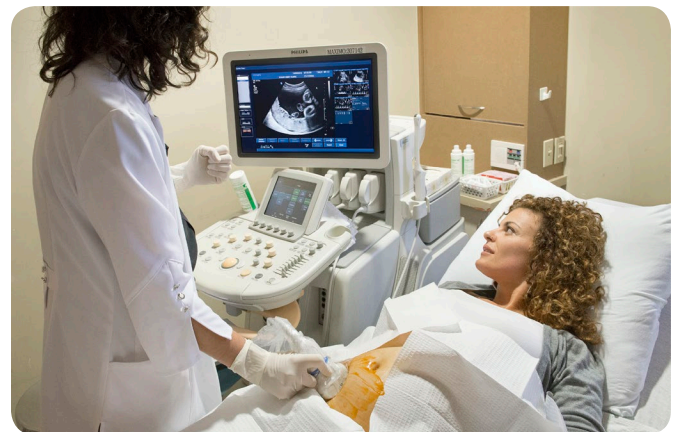
The services of a psychologist or social worker are available if you and your partner are interested.

How long does the test take?

It takes about 15 minutes. The actual sampling takes 2 to 3 minutes.

What does the test involve?

- You will be given a consent sheet. It is important to read it carefully so you can sign it in full knowledge of the facts.
- In the examination room, you will lie on your back.
- The doctor will do an ultrasound to visualize the placenta, amniotic fluid, and fetus. This allows him or her to know where to do the amniocentesis.



- The doctor disinfects the lower part of your abdomen.
- Guided constantly by ultrasound, the doctor will insert a needle through your abdomen and into your uterus. You may feel a cramp in your abdomen. In general, this feeling is not very painful.
- The doctor will remove about 30 ml (1/8 cup) of amniotic fluid. This represents at most 10% of the total. The fluid collected will be replaced by your body within 5 to 6 hours.

What precautions should I take AFTER the test?

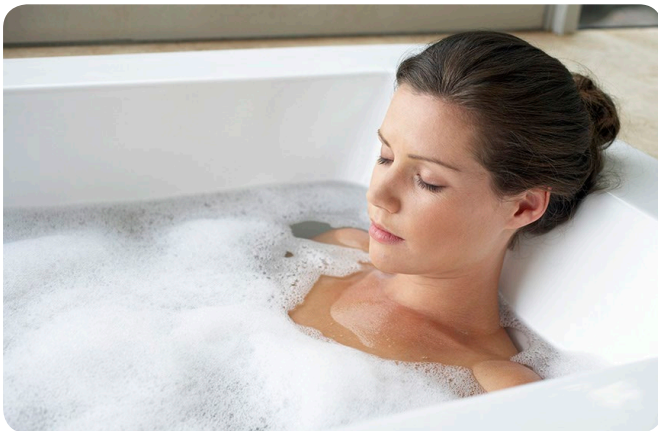
Follow these tips:

- travel by car, and come with someone who can drive you home
- take time off for the rest of the day
- after the test, relax, limit your activities, and rest for 24 hours before going back to work

Could I have any discomfort AFTER the amniocentesis?

You could have abdominal cramps or lose amniotic fluid through the vagina. Rest or reduced activity is usually enough to eliminate these discomforts.

If the abdominal cramps persist, you can take a hot bath and lie down. You can also take acetaminophen, such as Tylenol, to relieve pain.



When will I know the results?

The time may vary depending on the type of analysis. The doctor you meet before amniocentesis will tell you the likely time frame. For example, an analysis of the fetal chromosomes to determine, among other things, whether there is a trisomy takes about 3 to 4 weeks (preliminary results for trisomies 13, 18, and 21 are, however, given within 48 hours after amniocentesis).

What signs and symptoms should I watch for?

Contact the delivery room if:

- the pain persists for several hours after the test
- you lose amniotic fluid after more than 24 hours
- you have a fever of more than 38°C (100.4°F)
- you are worried

Who can I contact for help or to ask questions?

Before the test, you can call the Obstetrics Clinic.

After the test, you can call the delivery room, where a nurse is available 24 hours a day.



USEFUL RESOURCES

Naître et grandir (French only):

> naitreetgrandir.com

Click on grossesse → 1^{er} trimestre → amniocentèse

Baby Center :

> babycenter.ca

Type “amniocentesis” into the search bar

To learn more about pregnancy, delivery, or follow-up care, visit our internet site.



Videos, other fact sheets, and more resources are available at:

centredesnaissanceschum.com

The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal
chumontreal.qc.ca

