

Amniocentesis

How It Can Help You & Your Baby



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This pamphlet will explain:

- What amniocentesis is
- What happens during and after amniocentesis
- What the risks of amniocentesis are
- Who should get amniocentesis

What is Amniocentesis?

All pregnant women want to have a healthy baby. Fortunately, most babies are born healthy. But a small number of babies are born with a *birth defect*. Some birth defects can be tested for during pregnancy through amniocentesis.

Amniocentesis is a test done between 4 to 5 months of pregnancy that can give you information about birth defects your baby may have. A doctor will do the test in a hospital. It takes about an hour and you can go home after the test.

Amniocentesis can find some but not every kind of birth defect. Even if the results are normal, there is still a chance that the baby could have a mental or physical disorder.

What Happens During Amniocentesis?

During pregnancy, the baby grows in the mother's *uterus*. It is surrounded by a fluid called *amniotic fluid*. A small amount of amniotic fluid is removed from the uterus with a needle, and is tested for birth defects.

Word to Know

Birth defect: An abnormal physical or mental problem which is present in the baby at birth. It is a result of an abnormal **gene** or other causes such as injury, infection, etc.

Why is Ultrasound Important?

Ultrasound is another common test in pregnancy. It uses sound waves to show a picture of the baby on a screen. The baby's body is measured and checked for major physical problems.

Right before amniocentesis, ultrasound is used to look for an area in the uterus with lots of fluid that is far from the baby's body. Once this is found, the doctor puts a needle into the uterus. A small amount of fluid is taken out and sent to a lab where tests will be done.



What does Amniocentesis Test?

Test	What It May Mean
Alpha-fetoprotein (AFP) AFP is a substance produced by the baby. The level of AFP is measured to look for birth defects.	If you have higher than normal AFP levels, it is a sign of physical problems, such as neural tube defects, in the baby.
Chromosomes Chromosomes in the baby's skin cells are looked at to see if the chromosomes' shape and amounts are normal.	If the shape and number of chromosomes are abnormal, it is a sign of Down Syndrome or Trisomy 18 in your baby.

Amniocentesis can test for other genetic disorders, especially if a specific disorder is known to be in your family.

Words to Know

Chromosomes: Structures that carry genes inside cells. We have 46 chromosomes (organized in 23 pairs).

Genes: Genes provide information on how our bodies grow and function. They can determine features such as eye color, hair color, height and certain genetic disorders.

Should You Get Amniocentesis?

If you are pregnant and said "yes" to any of the questions below, you should think about getting amniocentesis.

1. Will you be 35 years old when the baby is born?
2. Have you already had a baby with a birth defect?
3. Is there a history of genetic disorders in the family?
4. Have you had more than two miscarriages?
5. Have you had an abnormal result from certain blood tests done earlier in the pregnancy?
6. Have you had an ultrasound that shows a possible inherited problem in the baby?

What are the Risks?

Most women will have minor cramps afterwards but this is normal. There is a very small chance of *complications* and *miscarriage*. If you have fever, vaginal bleeding, pain, or other unusual symptoms, you should see a doctor right away.

What Happens After Amniocentesis?

After the test, you should relax and rest. Move slowly when you are on the stairs. Do not do any physical activity, or pick up or carry heavy objects. Your doctor will give you more specific advice.

What if the Test Results are Not Normal?

If your test results are not normal, you should see a *genetic counselor*.

A genetic counselor is a trained health care professional who works with people that may be at risk for a genetic disorder or abnormal pregnancy. The genetic counselor will explain the meaning of the test results and will discuss treatment, further testing or pregnancy management options. The genetic counselor can give information to help you make informed decisions about your pregnancy.

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If you have any questions regarding the information contained in this brochure, please call our health educators at (212) 966-0228 ext. 132

如果你對本小冊子的內容有任何問題，請和我們的健康教育員聯系。

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