

Before You Get Your Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter (PICC)

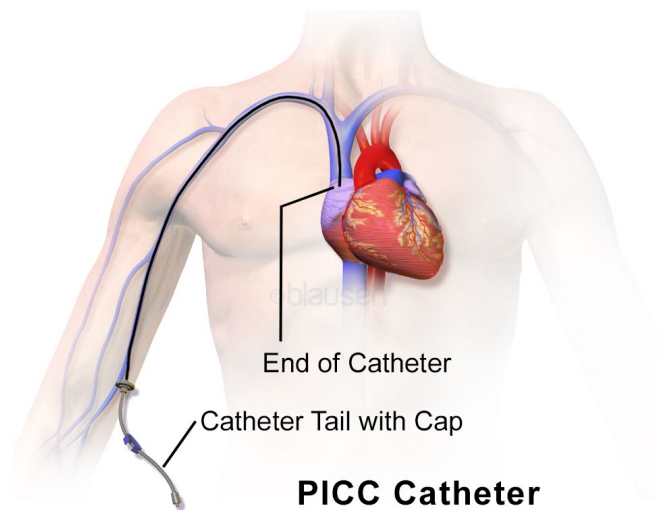
What is a PICC?

A PICC is a type of intravenous (IV) device. It is a very long, thin, soft flexible catheter. In adults, we insert PICCs through a vein in your arm to provide intravenous medications or draw blood.

Depending on the duration of your treatment, a PICC can remain in place for weeks to months at the discretion of your doctor.

Where in my body is a PICC located?

- We insert a PICC into a vein in your arm, usually just above the elbow.
- We thread the PICC through a vein in the arm so the end (called the tip) rests in one of the larger veins in your chest (near your heart). This position helps ensure that the PICC is safe to use.



By Blausen Medical Communications, Inc. CC BY 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

Why do I need a PICC?

We often consider PICCs for patients who need one or more of the following:

- IV medications that can cause damage to the smaller veins in the arm
- IV treatment over a prolonged period of time such as weeks or months (example: antibiotics, chemotherapy, blood transfusions)
- Blood draws or infusions for people whose veins are difficult to access
- IV fluids for hydration or nutrition that can't be provided by mouth or absorbed by the stomach

How is a PICC inserted?

A specially trained healthcare professional will insert the PICC. The procedure can be done in your hospital room or in a special procedure room, often the interventional radiology suite.

- Most patients feel little or no discomfort during the insertion. We may use a local numbing medication to minimize the pain associated with the needle stick.
- After the PICC is in place, it will be checked to make sure the end of the catheter is in the right location in your body. After this is verified, your PICC can be used to draw blood or receive treatments.

What are the risks of a PICC?

The risks involved with inserting a PICC include:

- Accidental puncture of a blood vessel, nerve or tendon near the insertion site
- Bleeding
- Infection either at the site of PICC placement or in the bloodstream
- Blood clots in veins where the PICC is placed
- Incorrect positioning of the end (or tip) of the catheter requiring either an adjustment or removal of the PICC
- Breakage of the catheter
- Blockage of the PICC requiring medication to open the blockage or removal of the PICC

What precautions should I know about living with a PICC?

You will be able to bend and use your arm as normal while the PICC is in place, but you will need to follow some precautions to ensure your PICC stays in place and functions well.

- Do not carry heavy weights (more than 5lbs).
- Do not exercise vigorously with your arm while the PICC is in place.
- Avoid contact with water when you have a PICC. You can shower with your PICC in place with a waterproof covering (plastic wrapping or commercially available products).
- Do not swim or take a tub bath (submerge) while the PICC is in place.

How will I care for my PICC?

- Change the clear covering (bandage) on your PICC at least once a week or sooner if loose, wet, or soiled.
- You, a family member, nurse, home care agency, doctor's office, or infusion clinic will need to flush the PICC periodically to keep the line open

What are the other options instead of a PICC?

There are other types of catheters that administer medications, nutrition or blood.

- **Regular Peripheral IV-** placed in your arm or hand for medications that you can receive through this route. Keep in mind you must change this every 3 to 5 days.
- **Midline-** placed in your arm by a physician or nurse. Remains in place for 2 to 3 weeks. Only certain medications can be given through this device.
- **Non-Tunneled-** inserted by a doctor into your neck, upper chest or groin. Often placed in an operating room. With this catheter in place you must typically remain in the hospital.
- **Tunneled Catheter-** placed in your neck or chest and anchored under your skin so that it does not come out as easily as a central line. These devices tend to be more difficult to insert and remove and are often used for chemotherapy.
- **Port-** implanted under your skin for long term use. This requires going to the operating room for insertion. A port may remain in place for many years and be used repeatedly. This is often used for chemotherapy.