

Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter (PICC) Placement: What to Expect

The purpose of this handout is to help you and your family understand your PICC line insertion and how to care for it. You may need a PICC line if you need long term treatments such as antibiotics, blood transfusions or intravenous nutrition.

What is a PICC line?

PICC stands for Peripherally Inserted Central Venous Catheter. A **catheter** is a long, thin, flexible tube that is inserted into a vein above your elbow. The PICC is designed to reach a larger vein in your chest, however you will only be aware of a small length of line resting on your arm. Once the PICC line is in place, it needs to be looked after carefully to prevent problems. The weekly care will consist of:

- Changing the dressing to reduce the risk of infection and keep the line in place and secured.
- Flushing the line with a solution to reduce the risk of the PICC line getting blocked between uses.

Why do I need a PICC line?

PICC lines are often used if you are going to receive IV medications that can cause damage to the smaller veins in the arm. They are also used for blood draws or infusions for people whose veins are difficult to access. PICC lines stay in place for as long as needed.

What should I expect when the PICC line is put in?

A Vascular Access Service Team Nurse (VAST) will discuss the procedure with you. You will have the opportunity to ask questions. If you are willing to proceed, you will be asked to sign a consent form.

The PICC line is placed in your room while you are in your bed. The insertion of the PICC line is not an operation but it is treated as a sterile procedure:

- Your body is cleaned and covered with sterile drapes.
- The VAST Nurse wears a sterile gown, mask and gloves.

Ultrasound is used to locate the best vein in your upper arm. A small injection of Lidocaine is given to numb the area where the line is put in. Inserting the PICC line can take 30-60 minutes. There is a transparent (see-through) dressing on the entry site. After the PICC line is inserted successfully, the VAST RN checks the line using either a tracking device or a chest x-ray to ensure the PICC line is in the correct position before use.

What can I expect after my PICC line is inserted?

Sometimes the arm above the PICC line can become tender and inflamed. Applying heat to the muscle of your arm above the PICC line can help. Any tenderness should disappear within 1-2 days. You may have some bleeding from the PICC line insertion site within the first 24 hours after insertion. This is normal. You should be able to do all day-to-day (regular) activities.

Can I have a bath or shower?

Your PICC line will have a see-through dressing over it. It is not waterproof. Cover the dressing with a plastic bag, a plastic sleeve or plastic wrap when showering to protect the dressing and the PICC line. This should prevent the dressing from coming off and will reduce the risk of infection. If you have a bath, then please keep your arm out of the water.

What should I avoid doing?

- We do not advise swimming while you have a PICC line because of the risk of infection.
- If you have a specific job or hobby which requires a lot of repetitive movement (such as fly-fishing, golf, weight lifting, or painting) please discuss this with the nurse or doctor.

What should I do if I have a problem with the PICC line?

Side effects with PICC lines are unusual, but it is important to know about them. Discuss any problems with the nursing team caring for you.

If you are no longer an inpatient, contact the home care nurse or doctor if:

- Your PICC line (or dressing) is fully or partially pulled out
- There is leaking, or wetness
- You develop a fever (temperature above 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit/38 degrees Celsius).
- You develop chills
- The area around the insertion site is:
 - Red
 - Swollen
 - Wet or dirty
 - Sore
 - Oozing
- The PICC line becomes blocked or you are unable to flush/difficult to flush
- Dressing becomes soiled or loose and insertion site is exposed
- Redness, pain or discomfort above the PICC line insertion site
- Discomfort in your PICC line arm or shoulder. It may become red and swollen

Other side effects that you may experience, that your provider will monitor for include:

- Blood Clots (thrombosis)
- Infection
- Inflammation of the veins (phlebitis)
- Swelling of the veins of your neck

How will my PICC line be removed?

When you no longer require your PICC line, it will be removed by one of your nurses. This is not painful and is done by gently sliding the PICC line out of the insertion site. A new sterile dressing will be applied which can be removed after 24 hours. If you have any questions or would like more information, please do not hesitate to contact one of the Vascular Access Service Team (VAST) at (734) 936-9786.

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