

Peripheral inserted central catheter (PICC)

The Royal Women's Hospital Fact Sheet / www.thewomens.org.au



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What is a peripherally inserted central catheter?

A PICC is used for the long term delivery of intravenous medication, chemotherapy and fluids. It is often recommended when suitable veins for injections are difficult to access. A PICC may be in place for up to 12 months.

A PICC is a long thin soft tube that is inserted into your arm near the bend of the elbow and threaded through your veins until the tip is in a large vein near the heart.

PICC insertion

Your PICC line will be put in by a radiologist at the Pauline Gandel Imaging Centre located in on Level 1. Ultrasound is used to find a vein on the inside of your arm and to guide the radiologist through the procedure. You will be given a local anaesthetic before the PICC line is inserted. The procedure can take up to one hour to complete.

PICC dressing

The PICC is secured using a waterproof dressing and a type of clamp. This is important for keeping the area clean and dry as well as preventing the PICC line from being accidentally removed or dislodged.



There is often a small amount of bleeding around the insertion site during the first 24 hours. The nursing or midwifery staff caring for you will replace the dressing the day after the PICC has been inserted. Your PICC line will then be re-dressed and flushed on a weekly basis.

Should you notice water under the dressing or the dressing begins to lift off, you must contact the nursing or midwifery team as soon as possible to organise a replacement dressing.

A tubifast may also be placed over the PICC dressing for support and comfort.



General care

For the first 2 hours after insertion:

- restrict arm movement to minimise bleeding and promote comfort.

While the PICC is in place:

- avoid heavy physical activity, such as lifting or digging or sports that are either vigorous or involve contact
- avoid swimming or submerging your arm in a bath

- avoid using scissors or sharp objects near your PICC line
- make sure the dressing remains dry and intact
- before showering, cover the PICC with plastic wrap. The plastic wrap should encircle the arm, without pressure and tape applied to the top and bottom to prevent the dressing from getting wet.

What can go wrong with my PICC?

Bleeding

You may notice a slight oozing of blood from the insertion site during the first 24 hours after the PICC has been inserted. Time and the application of pressure usually stops this quite quickly with no ongoing problems.

If you take blood thinning medications such as Aspirin or Warfarin, please let the medical and nursing staff know before the PICC is inserted. These medications can increase the risk of bleeding and may need to be adjusted prior to the insertion of your PICC line.

Phlebitis (redness along the arm)

The PICC line can sometimes irritate the inside of the vein wall leading to redness, swelling and pain for the first 24-72 hours after insertion. This is not usually an infection but the body's response to foreign material. Warm hot packs to the area 3-4 times a day can bring relief and symptoms should subside in a few days.

Infection

Common signs and symptoms of infection are pain, redness, warmth or discharge from the insertion site; feeling unwell or nauseous; a rise in body temperature.

If you experience the following symptoms you should seek medical attention urgently as it may indicate that you have a blood stream infection:

- fever (temperature greater than 38 degrees) and chills - with or without fatigue, loss of appetite.

In order to prevent an infection, your PICC should remain covered with a dry waterproof dressing.

Thrombosis

The PICC can rub against and irritate the internal vessel wall of the vein causing a blood clot (thrombosis) to form. The signs and symptoms of thrombosis are pain along the vein and neck; swelling in the arm, neck or face; a change in skin temperature and colour. **If you suspect a clot please go to your nearest hospital emergency department.**

Catheter tip movement

Catheter tip movement within the body can be triggered by excessive coughing, vomiting, sneezing or hiccupping. Signs and symptoms include pain or discomfort in the shoulder, jaw, ear or neck. Excessive use of the arm with the PICC can also cause the catheter tip to be dislodged

At every dressing change your nurse should measure the length of your PICC line and cross check this measurement with the initial length of your PICC when it was inserted.

Should any of the above problems occur it is essential that you notify the nursing team caring for you as soon as possible. See contact numbers (next column).

Frequently asked questions

Does the PICC always need a dressing?

Yes, to keep it in place, prevent damage to the catheter and protect the site from infection.

Can I shower or bath?

If the PICC gets wet it will increase the risk of infection. You can shower provided that the PICC line has a dressing and in addition you cover the PICC with plastic wrap to protect it from getting wet. Submerging your arm with the PICC in a bath is not recommended as it increases your risk of developing an infection.

What happens if the PICC gets pulled out?

If your PICC gets pulled out, apply pressure to the insertion site which will stop the bleeding and notify your nursing team as soon as possible.

What happens if the PICC line breaks?

If the PICC line breaks or cracks immediately apply a clamp close to the insertion site and call an Ambulance (000), this is an emergency. Lay on your left side to prevent migration of the catheter. Your nurse will show you how to apply the clamps after your PICC line has been inserted.

Contact numbers at the Women's

Royal Women's Hospital

Cnr Grattan Street & Flemington Road
Parkville 3055

Tel: (03) 8345 2000 (switchboard)

Emergency Department

Lower Ground Floor
Entrance from Flemington Road
Tel: (03) 8345 3636 (24 hours)

5 North Oncology and Dysplasia Unit

Level 5
Tel: (03) 8345 3530 (24 hours)

Chemotherapy Day Centre

Level 5
Tel: (03) 8345 3570
Mon to Fri
8.00am-4.30pm

Home Based Services

Ground Floor
Tel: (03) 8345 2060
Mon to Fri
8.00am-4.30pm

For more information

Cancer Treatments Online

Cancer Institute NSW
www.eviq.org.au