



Midline catheter insertion: Virtual Acute Care Unit (VACU)

This leaflet aims to help you understand what a midline catheter is, why it is used, and what to expect when one is inserted.

VACU telephone: 0118 322 5201 (8am-8pm, Mon-Sun)

VACU email rbb-tr.vhs@nhs.net

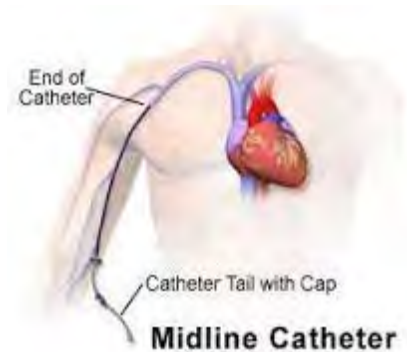
Out of hours: 111 or 999



What is a midline catheter?

A midline catheter is a small, flexible tube 8-20cm long that is placed into a vein in your upper arm, with the tip resting just below your armpit. It helps avoid repeated needle insertions during treatment, by giving direct access to your bloodstream so that medications, IV fluids, and blood products can be given safely and easily.

A midline catheter can remain in place for up to 4 weeks.



How is the midline catheter inserted?

A vascular access nurse or clinical nurse specialist will insert the catheter. Strict sterile techniques will prevent any germs from entering your body. The same level of care will be used for all procedures involving your catheter.

During the insertion, the clinician may wear a gown, mask, eye protection, and gloves.

The catheter will be placed into a vein in either arm, usually near the elbow, and an ultrasound machine will help identify the best vein.

A local anaesthetic will then be applied to numb the area where the catheter will go through the skin. You might feel a brief pinch from the needle, but you should not feel the catheter being passed into the vein. The whole procedure typically takes about 30-60 minutes.

What to expect after your midline catheter is placed

Your arm may feel a bit tender for a short time after the line is inserted, but you should not experience any lasting discomfort.

Care and maintenance of your midline catheter

Once the catheter is in place, a small section of the tube will remain outside your body. A protective dressing will be applied over the insertion site to keep it clean and prevent infection. This sterile dressing must stay on at all times.

The catheter will be secured with an anchoring device – an adhesive pad placed on your arm that the catheter clips onto. A needle-free connector will also be attached to the end of the catheter to keep the system closed and help protect against bloodstream infections.

Depending on your treatment needs, you or a carer may be taught how to care for the catheter.

Always follow the instructions provided by your nurse, physician associate or doctor.

- **Caution:** If you notice blood inside the catheter, inform a nurse immediately so it can be flushed, as this may lead to blockage or infection.
- **Caution:** Do not allow anyone to take your blood pressure on the arm with the catheter, as this can damage or block it.
- **Caution:** Never try to remove the catheter yourself. It can only be removed by a trained healthcare professional.

Risks and complications

- **Infection:** The most common risk with midline catheters is infection, especially if the line is not cared for properly. Anyone handling your midline should wash their hands and wear gloves. The end of the line must always be cleaned thoroughly before each use.
- **Phlebitis:** This is inflammation of the vein and can cause pain, redness, or swelling.
- **Thrombosis:** There is a small chance of developing a blood clot in the arm where the line is placed, although this is uncommon. If you notice shoulder pain, a heavy feeling in your arm, or swelling, inform your nurse or healthcare professional immediately. An ultrasound doppler may be carried out to check for a DVT.
- **Bathing / Showering:** You may continue to shower or bathe, but should avoid getting the catheter site wet. You will be given a plastic sleeve to cover the arm with the midline, and you should use it every time to keep the dressing and line dry and intact, as moisture increases the risk of infection.
- **Activity:** You can continue most of your normal daily activities and keep your arm moving. However, avoid strenuous activities or contact sports, as these may dislodge the line. Swimming is not allowed while a midline catheter is in place. If you are unsure about returning to a specific activity, please ask your nurse or doctor.

Things to look out for

If the skin around your line becomes red or sore, or if you start to feel shivery or cold after the line is flushed, this could be a sign of infection. If you notice pain or swelling in your arm, shoulder, or neck, please inform your nurse or doctor right away.

If you have any concerns at all about your midline or your treatment, please get in touch. We are here to support you in any way we can.

If you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to call our Virtual Acute Care Unit number – we are happy to help as we know this can be very stressful and scary.

0118 322 5201

Are you a carer?

Carers give unpaid care to a family member, partner or friend who needs help because of their illness, frailty, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction and cannot cope without their support. The Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust is committed to recognising their valuable role. If you would like any additional support or information please speak to our team or visit our Carers Support webpage. www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/accessible-information-and-reasonable-adjustments/carers-support

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

RBFT Virtual Acute Care Unit, June 2026

Next review due: June 2028