



# Hickman catheter insertion

Information for patients

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This leaflet is designed to help you understand what a Hickman catheter is, why they are used and what is involved when you have one placed.

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### What is a Hickman catheter?

A Hickman catheter is a type of central venous device. You may hear staff referring to it as a “line.” The Hickman line is a comfortable and safe means of giving chemotherapy and associated treatments. It is also possible to withdraw blood samples from the line when required. The Hickman line is made of a thin, soft non-irritant material called silicone, which is latex free. You cannot feel the catheter inside you. Once the catheter is in, it will not show under a shirt or blouse.

### Why are Hickman catheters used?

Hickman lines are used for a variety of reasons:

- There are many different types of chemotherapies; some of these can only be given through a Hickman line.
- If your arm veins are not suitable for treatment.

### Preparation for your procedure

- You will be given a date and time for your catheter to be put in by the chemotherapy booking nurse.
- If you chose sedation, you must not eat or drink for 4 hours before your line is placed. Please use a small amount of water needed to take any of your regular medication.
- You cannot drive for 24 hours after you have had your line put in if you have been sedated. Someone will need to drive you home afterwards.

### How is the catheter put in?

The Hickman line is inserted into a large vein in the lower part of your neck or upper chest. The line is tunnelled under your skin (not in the

vein) to your chest wall just below your collar bone. It is only at this point your line becomes visible.

There is a cuff, which feels like a small lump under your skin in the 'tunnel', which holds the line in place. Two stitches will be placed to hold the line in position while the cuff is taking to the tissue. The stitches will be removed by your nurse after 21 days.

Where the line comes out onto your chest it will be covered with a see-through, waterproof dressing.

The line will be put in, in Radiology Department Level 1, by the Vascular Access Nurse or an Interventional Radiologist. It is put in under sterile conditions to avoid the risk of infection. You will be asked to put on a hospital gown and lie flat on the bed. A small drip will be put into your arm if you chose to have sedation. Sedation makes you feel pleasantly relaxed. If you chose sedation we give you oxygen via a face mask to help maintain your oxygen levels, because you do not breathe quite as deeply under sedation. A routine monitoring clip will be put onto your finger to monitor your oxygen levels and heart rate throughout the procedure.

## Risks and complications

As with every procedure there are some complications and risks. These will be fully explained to you before we place your line. Once the procedure has been explained and you are happy to proceed, you will be asked to sign a consent form.

## After your Hickman catheter is placed.

Once you have had your line placed, you will be able to sit up and have something to eat and drink. Your neck and chest may feel tender but for no longer than 48 hours. Having had something to eat and drink, a porter will take you in a wheelchair to the x-ray department to have a chest x-ray. This is to confirm that the Hickman line is in the right position. The line cannot be used until the x-ray is done. It does not take very long to place the line, but there can at times be a delay in getting you to the x-ray department - we will do our best to speed this up.

## Who looks after the Hickman line?

Your district nurse will be the main person responsible for looking after your catheter. She will change the dressing weekly (if you decide to have one) and clean the area where the catheter goes into your skin. She will also flush the line weekly to clean it and will also take any blood samples necessary. We will contact your district nurse to let her know you have had a Hickman line put in.

## Bathing and showering

You may do both. However, if you have a shower, stand in the shower with your back to the water. When you have a bath, never fully immerse your line under the water. Getting it wet may increase the risk of infection. You will not be able to swim with a Hickman line in place. Please do not allow anything to pull or drag on the catheter.

## Things to look out for

If the skin around your line becomes red, painful or if you feel “shivery” or cold after your line has been flushed, it may mean you have an infection. If your arm, shoulder or neck becomes painful, or swollen please contact the hospital department you are having treatment in or your district nurse.

If you are ever concerned in any way about your line or your treatment, never hesitate to contact the hospital department you are having treatment in or your district nurse, we are here to help you in any way we can.

This document can be made available in other languages and other formats upon request.

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Revised: September 2018

Review due: September 2020