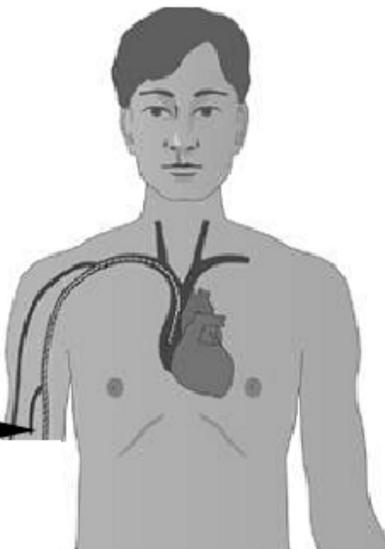


PICC enters
your arm here
well above the
bend of your
elbow



Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter (PICC) insertion

Information for patients

This leaflet is designed to help you understand what a Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter (PICC) is, why they are used and what is involved when you have one placed.

What is a PICC line?

Peripherally Inserted Central Catheters (PICC), referred to as PICC lines (or just “line”) are commonly used as a more comfortable and safer means of giving chemotherapy and associated treatments.

A PICC is a long, fine tube that is inserted into your arm well above the bend of your elbow. It will not restrict the movement of your arm or affect any of your daily activities. It travels up inside your arm into a very large vein. You cannot feel it inside you. The line is made of a thin, soft, non-irritant material called polyurethane, which is latex free. A line can be left in place for as many weeks or months as you need it. It does not need to be changed.

Why are PICC lines used?

One of the main reasons for having a PICC is to stop patients having needles repeatedly inserted into their veins whilst receiving chemotherapy treatment.

In addition to receiving chemotherapy, it will be necessary to regularly take blood samples, both during and after treatment. Once the PICC line is in place, blood samples can be taken from the line.

The use of PICC lines for chemotherapy treatment is deemed to be a safer, painless and a much more efficient way for a patient to have their treatment.

How is the line put in?

You will be given a date and time for your line to be put in by the Chemotherapy booking nurse. The line will be put in in the Radiology department by a nurse who has been specifically trained to do so. You do not have to do anything to prepare for this.

The procedure is performed under sterile conditions to avoid the risk of infection. A local anaesthetic is administered to “numb” the area on your arm where the line goes into your skin. The procedure itself is no more uncomfortable than having a blood sample taken. It should take no more than 30-60 minutes, which includes a post-insertion x-ray to confirm its position. You will be able to drive afterwards. There is no need to be accompanied on the day your line is put in, but if you would like a friend or relative to be with you they are very welcome.

After your PICC line is placed

If an optimum position of the catheter cannot be confirmed with the magnetic tracking system you will need to have a chest x-ray after the PICC is placed to ensure that the line is in the right position before it is used for your treatment.

Your arm may feel slightly tender for a short time after the line has been inserted but you should feel no ill effects afterwards.

Risks and complications:

Infection: The main risk with PICC lines is that they may become infected once they are in place if not looked after properly. Staff caring for or using your PICC line should always wash their hands and wear gloves before touching your line. The end of the line should always be cleaned thoroughly before use.

Thrombosis: There is a small risk that patients with a line can develop thrombosis or “clot” in their arm that the line is in. This happens very infrequently. If you develop any shoulder pain or a swollen arm, please contact us.

Bathing/Showering: You may do both. You will be supplied with a plastic sleeve to cover your arm and the PICC. This should be used every time you have a shower or bath. The line and dressing should not get wet as this may increase the risk of infection.

Activity: Carry on as much as normal and do not restrict the movement of your arm. Vigorous activity such as contact sports may displace the

line and should be avoided. Please note that it is not possible for you to go swimming with a PICC in place.

Who will look after the catheter?

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

What 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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Daniela Jac, Sister Radiology & Vascular Access.

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