

Peripherally inserted central catheter (PICC)

Patient information factsheet

What is a peripherally inserted central catheter (PICC)?

- A PICC (also called a PICC line) is a long, thin, flexible tube that is inserted into a large vein in the upper arm.
- It is used to put medication into the bloodstream.
- A PICC can be left in place for a long period of time until your treatment is complete.
- It allows medicines and nutrition to be delivered directly into a large vein.
- The tube is between 38 and 52cm long – the length of the tube depends on:
 - How tall you are
 - Where we insert the tube.

Why do I need a PICC line?

- The reason for you having a PICC line will depend on your medical condition and your treatment.
- A PICC line can be used for various treatments, including:
 - antibiotics
 - chemotherapy
 - blood transfusions
 - intravenous (IV) nutrition
 - IV treatment at home.
- It can also be used to take samples of your blood for testing.
- If you are having a Computed Tomography (CT) scan or a Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scan you might need an injection of a liquid (called 'contrast media') that will make the images more clear. Your Radiographer may be able to deliver this liquid via the PICC.

What will happen before the procedure?

- You can eat and drink normally before the procedure.
- Sometimes, if you take medicine that thins your blood (for example to help stop blood clots), the doctor might ask you to stop taking it for a little while before the test.
- Wear a top with short sleeves or sleeves that can be easily rolled up so that your upper arm is easy to get to.

What happens during the procedure?

- It will take place in a room in the Radiology department.
- The health care professional will explain the procedure and answer your questions.
- You will lay on an x-ray table.
- You will need to lie flat for the entire procedure. If you think this may be difficult, please let the doctor/nurse know beforehand.
- An ultrasound machine will be used to find the best vein on your arm.
- The area will be sterilised (made clean), and drapes (a kind of cover for your arm) will be applied.
- Local anaesthetic will be used to numb the skin.
- It may sting slightly when this is given.
- You should not feel any pain after the local anaesthetic has been given.
- A small needle, under ultrasound guidance, will go into your vein.
- A wire is gently placed through the needle. This is the guide for the PICC to be inserted.
- X-rays will be used to help guide the PICC into a large vein just above your heart.
- When the health care professional is happy with the placement, the area will be cleaned.
- The end of the line will come out of the insertion site.
- This will be attached with a sticky dressing to your arm and a tubular bandage will be applied on top.
- The procedure will take 30 minutes.

Are there any risks associated with the procedure?

- **Infection** – all procedures carry a risk of infection. This is why we make sure that this procedure is done in a sterile (clean) environment to reduce that risk.
- **Bleeding** – this procedure is done with ultrasound guidance to try and reduce the risk of bleeding. Sometimes bleeding does happen, and you may notice bruising around the site. In most cases this will heal on its own.
- **Pain** – all procedures have a risk of causing pain. This procedure is performed using local anaesthetic to reduce this. There may be some stinging as the local anaesthetic goes in. After this you should not feel any sharp pain but may feel some pushing and pulling.
- **Failure of the procedure** – Sometimes the health care professional cannot complete the procedure. In this case, they will discuss alternative options with you.
- **Blood clot** – in some cases the vein where the line is inserted can develop a blood clot. If this were to happen, you would notice your hand and arm becoming hot and swollen. You should inform a health care professional if you notice these symptoms. If this happened the line would be removed, and you would be treated with blood thinning medications.

What will happen after the procedure?

- The line will be ready for use immediately.
- You must be careful of the short section of line that comes out of the insertion site. You must make sure that it does not catch on things that could pull it out.
- You can drive a car after the procedure.
- You may have a little pain when the local anaesthetic wears off.
- You can take simple painkillers like paracetamol if you need to.
- You may have some bruising or swelling around the area where we inserted the PICC. This is common especially during the first week after the procedure.
- Continue to move your arm as normal, If the bruising and swelling continues after the first week, contact the healthcare team that referred you to have the PICC.

Do's and Don'ts

Do

- Always keep the insertion site dry.
- Always use a waterproof cover, such as cling film, when washing.
- Always wash your hands when you handle the PICC.

Don't

- Don't let the PICC go under water.
- Don't swim.
- Don't do any activities that might make the PICC line come out (including golf/tennis/intense physical activity).

Looking after your PICC

- When you are at home, the district nurse or a trained family member, partner, friend can help you to look after your PICC.
- If you come into hospital, the nurses will also help you look after your PICC.
- Clean the PICC and change the dressing weekly.
- Flush the PICC with saline (salt water). Ask the health care professional to teach you how to do this.

When should I contact someone?

If you think something is wrong, or if you have any of the following, immediately contact the healthcare team that referred you to have the PICC:

- Pain, redness, oozing or swelling around the insertion site – this could mean you have an infection or blood clot.
- High temperatures (above 37.5°C), chills or feeling unwell – this could be a sign of infection.
- Bleeding from the insertion site – if this happens, apply pressure to the bleeding site and raise your arm.
- Increase in the length of tube outside of your arm.
- Pain when you flush the PICC or discharge from the arm whilst flushing.

Removing the PICC

- When the PICC is no longer needed, it can be removed by a medical professional.
- A nurse will remove the dressing and gently pull the PICC out.
- Gentle pressure will be applied to the area for a few minutes to prevent bleeding.
- A dressing will be applied to the wound to keep the wound dry.
- This can be removed after 24 hours.

Contact our service

If you have any questions, please speak to your nominated Clinical Nurse Specialist in the Oncology/Chemotherapy Unit.

Contact our Trust

If you have a compliment, complaint or concern, please contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on **020 7288 5551** or whh-tr.PALS@nhs.net.

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this leaflet, please email whh-tr.patient-information@nhs.net. We will try our best to meet your needs.

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