

# Portacath (totally implantable venous access device/TIVAD)

A portacath is a central venous access device. It is used to give treatments and blood transfusions into your bloodstream and to take blood samples.

## What is a portacath?

A portacath is used instead of cannulas (needles in your arm) for your treatments. Cannulas are put in for each treatment, but a portacath stays in for the length of your treatments. This makes having frequent, repeated, continuous or at-home cancer treatments easier. Some portacaths can also be used for some types of scans.

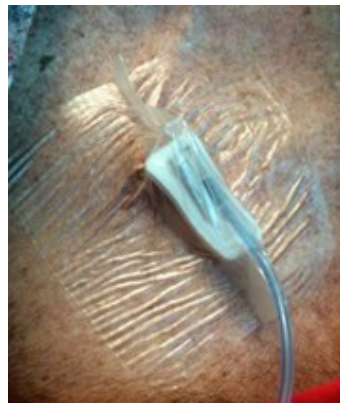
A portacath is made up of two parts: (1) a hard walled body with a silicone pad in the middle which is attached to (2) a flexible tube (**catheter**) which travels into the bloodstream, with the end sitting just above the heart.

Portacaths are completely covered by skin that heals over the top. They are usually placed in the upper chest, or sometimes in the upper inner arm.

You may also hear them called a **port**, **TIVAD** or **CVAD**.



How a portacath looks in place  
Image permission: K Curtis



Accessed portacath with dressing  
Image permission: K Curtis

## How is my portacath put in?

- It will be put in by a specially trained member of your healthcare team in the radiology department or operating theatre.
- This can be done while you are in hospital or as a day patient and then you can go home afterwards.
- Local anaesthetic will numb the area. Some people have light sedation or a general anaesthetic.
- After the portacath is in, you'll have 2 sets of stitches, near your neck and on your chest or arm.
- The stitches usually dissolve on their own, but your nurse will tell you if and when they need to be taken out.
- You'll have a dressing over the area until your skin has healed. Your nurse will teach you how to look after it.
- You may have a chest X-ray to check it's in place.
- You may have some bruising and mild discomfort for a few days.
- For the next week don't do any heavy lifting and strenuous exercise.
- When the skin has healed, you'll see and feel a small bump where the portacath is.

## Do you know?

Date portacath was put in: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of your next portacath flush: \_\_\_\_\_

Who and when to contact if you have any questions or concerns? \_\_\_\_\_

## Contact numbers

Daytime: \_\_\_\_\_

Night/weekend: \_\_\_\_\_

## How is a portacath used?

- Your nurse will put a specially designed needle through the skin and into the silicone pad in the middle of the portacath. This is called **accessing the portacath**.
- You can use a special gel to numb the skin before the needle is put in. After the needle is in, your nurse will cover it with a dressing to keep it clean and in place.
- The special needle has a tube (a catheter) attached to it. Your nurse will give your treatment, or take blood from you, through the tube.
- Some people have short treatments in one day, and some continue the treatment at home. When your treatment is finished your nurse will remove the needle from the portacath. This is called **deaccessing the portacath**.

## How do I care for my portacath?

### Physical activity

Research shows that continuing physical activity during your treatment is good for your general wellbeing. Please discuss with your nurse or doctor what exercises are safe to perform.

### When a needle is in the portacath (accessed):

While you are in hospital the nurses will care for your portacath.

If your port is accessed and you are having treatment at home:

- Wash your hands before touching the dressing or tube.
- Look at the dressing every day to make sure it is not peeling back. Keep the dressing dry and clean.
- Avoid knocking the needle or pulling on the tube so you don't pull out the needle.

If your treatment goes for more than a week, a nurse will change your needle and dressing every 7 days.

If the dressing peels or the needle moves, call your nurse or doctor.

### When a needle is not in the portacath (not accessed):

You can exercise, shower, swim and continue your normal activities.

## Common questions

### ✓ What happens when I am not having treatment?

The portacath is flushed every 4 to 12 weeks when it is not in use. To flush, your nurse will access the portacath and put some fluid through it to make sure the portacath is still working. Check with your healthcare team about how often your portacath will be flushed.

### ✓ How long does my portacath stay in?

Your portacath can stay in for as long as it is needed.

### ✓ How is my portacath removed?

It is removed when you no longer need it in the radiology department or operating theatre.

## ! Important things to look out for:

Contact your nurse or doctor immediately if:

- you have a temperature of 38°C or higher
- when your portacath is accessed and the needle comes out
- you have redness, pain, swelling or fluid leaking from the stitches near your portacath.

If you can't contact your doctor or nurse, go to the nearest hospital emergency department for help.

Contact your doctor or nurse as soon as possible in working hours if:

- you have redness, pain, heat or swelling in your arm, chest, shoulder or neck area
- the dressing is peeling back so the needle is open to the air, or the dressing has been wet
- your skin is itchy, sore or stinging under the dressing.

For information for patient and carers scan the QR code



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