

Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter (PICC)

A PICC line is a type of central venous access device (CVAD). It can be used to give treatments such as chemotherapy, blood transfusions, fluids or other medications. A PICC line can be used instead of a cannula during your treatment. It may also be used to take blood samples. This is a common way of giving cancer treatments to people who need frequent or continuous infusions.

What is a PICC line?

A PICC line is a long flexible tube (catheter). The hollow space in the tube is called a lumen. A PICC line can have one, two or three lumens. Each lumen has a cap on the end.

One end of the PICC line sits in a vein just above the heart. The other end of the PICC line stays outside the body. This means your treatment can be given straight into the bloodstream.

You may also hear a PICC line called a central line or CVAD.

How is it put in?

- Your PICC line will be put in by a doctor or nurse in the day unit, on the ward, or in a radiology department.
- You will be given local anaesthetic to numb the area.
- The PICC line will be inserted into a vein in your arm. It is then threaded through the vein, so that the end of the line sits just above your heart.
- Part of the PICC line will remain outside your body.
- You will have a dressing over the area where your PICC line is. This keeps the area clean and helps to keep the line in place. This dressing should be changed once a week.
- You may experience some bruising and mild discomfort for the first few days.
- Applying a heat pack may help with mild discomfort.



! Important

Contact your doctor or nurse if you have:

- a temperature of 38°C or higher
- shortness of breath
- chest pain or fast heartbeat
- redness, pain, swelling, bleeding or fluid leaking from or around your PICC line
- redness, pain or swelling in your arm, neck or chest area
- damage or a break or split in the PICC line.

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

Caring for your PICC line

Physical activity

- Research shows that continuing physical activity during your treatment is good for your general well-being.
- There may be some activities that you are not able to do while you have your PICC line in.
- Talk to your doctor or nurse about what activities you can do.

Things to look out for

- Signs of infection such as redness, pain, pus or discharge.
- Signs of a clot such as swelling, discomfort, pain heat or redness in your shoulder, chest, neck or arm.
- Changes in the length of your PICC line.

Things to avoid

- Make sure your line does not get knocked or pulled out (keep your line secure).
- Avoid getting your PICC line wet.
- Make sure the dressing does not become loose, dirty or wet.
- Avoid using sharp objects near your line.

Common questions

What happens when I am not having treatment?

Your PICC line must be flushed and the dressing changed once a week. While you are in hospital the nurses will care for your line. If you are at home the hospital may arrange for a community nurse to do this, or your carer may be taught to do this.

How long does my PICC line stay in?

Your PICC line can stay in as long as it is needed, this can be weeks or months. When you no longer need your line, it can be taken out by a doctor or nurse.

Problems and complications

Most people don't have any problems with their PICC line. However, if there is a problem, it can usually be treated.

Problem	Treatment*
Infection: can develop around the line, or inside the line	Antibiotics
Blood clots: can form in the vein where your PICC line sits	Medication to dissolve the clot and prevent further clots
Blocked line: the inside of the line can block	Injecting a solution to clear the blockage
Line movement: the line can move to the wrong position	Repositioned by radiology department
Damaged line: the line can split or break	In some cases the line can be repaired
Collapsed lung (rare): can occur at the time the line is inserted	Treated immediately by your doctor
Unable to insert the line: can occur at the time the line is inserted	Your doctor may try again, or use a different CVAD

*In some cases the PICC line may need to be removed



What to ask your doctor or nurse

- What are the risks of having a PICC line?
- Can I play sport or go swimming?
- How do I bath/shower?
- How do I clamp the line if I need to?
- What do I do if there is fluid leaking from my PICC line?

Contact numbers:

Daytime:

Night/weekend:

Working together to lessen the impact of cancer

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