Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter (PICC)

Infection Prevention

Information for patients

It's OK to ask: Please feel free to remind your healthcare worker about cleaning their hands.

What is a peripherally inserted central catheter (PICC)?
A PICC is a small tube which is inserted into a vein in your arm, usually just above the elbow. It passes all the way through the vein and the tip is located at the opening of your heart.

A PICC is another way for medications or fluids to be delivered into your bloodstream. It can be left in place for weeks or months if necessary.

PICCs are held in place by a device that sticks to the skin on your arm, and is covered by a clear dressing.

How is the PICC inserted?
PICCs are inserted in the Radiology Department or Operating Theatre using X-ray equipment.

Your skin will be cleaned before a small amount of anaesthetic will be injected under your skin so that you won't feel pain. The PICC line is then slowly inserted into the vein.

The procedure usually takes about 30 minutes.

Potential complications with PICC insertion

Complications are not common. A small number of patients may experience:

Bleeding: A small amount of bleeding after the procedure is not unusual. However, if the blood is soaking through the dressing, apply pressure and tell your nurse or doctor.

Tenderness: Your arm may be tender where the PICC was inserted. This usually goes away after a few days. In the meantime, mild pain killers can help.

Blood clot: If you experience pain, swelling, heat, or redness in your arm, neck, or shoulder, you might have a clot in the vein around the PICC. You should notify your nurse or doctor as soon as possible if you experience these symptoms.

Occlusion: The PICC is a very narrow tube and it is possible that it may block. Your nurse will try to prevent this by flushing it with saline after every use, and attending to IV pumps promptly.

We recommend that you avoid any heavy lifting whilst your PICC line is in place.
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PICC dressings
The dressing on your PICC is usually changed once a week. It will be changed more often if it is wet, soiled, or peeling off.

An antiseptic patch is usually used at the insertion site to help reduce the risk of infection.

When showering, it is important that the dressing is kept dry. We recommend that you cover your PICC dressing with waterproof plastic and secure this with tape whilst showering.

You should avoid swimming or having a bath while you have a PICC, due to the risk of infection.

If your dressing does get wet, it is strongly recommended that you arrange to have a nurse change it as soon as possible.

NEVER remove your own PICC dressing, as it may fall out or become infected.

Infection prevention
It is important that your dressing remains clean and dry, and that it is changed on time.

Any person who handles your PICC (or your medications and drips) must always disinfect their hands beforehand. This can be done by washing with soap and water, or by using the alcohol based hand rub.

It is OK to ask your health care professional if they have cleaned their hands

In addition to this, we strongly recommend that the access points to your PICC or the drip lines are:
- cleaned thoroughly (‘scrub the hub’) with alcohol for about 15 seconds, and
- allowed to dry for about 30 seconds before any new syringes or lines are connected.

Removing the PICC
When your PICC is no longer needed, your nurse or doctor will remove it. This usually only takes a few minutes and is not painful.

Any questions?
If you would like further information about PICCs please contact Alfred Health Infection Prevention on (03) 9076 3139.

Further information:
Better Health Channel
www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au
National Safety & Quality
www.safetyandquality.gov.au/