

Care of Your Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter

A guide for patients and their carers

Acute Oncology

Patient Information Leaflet

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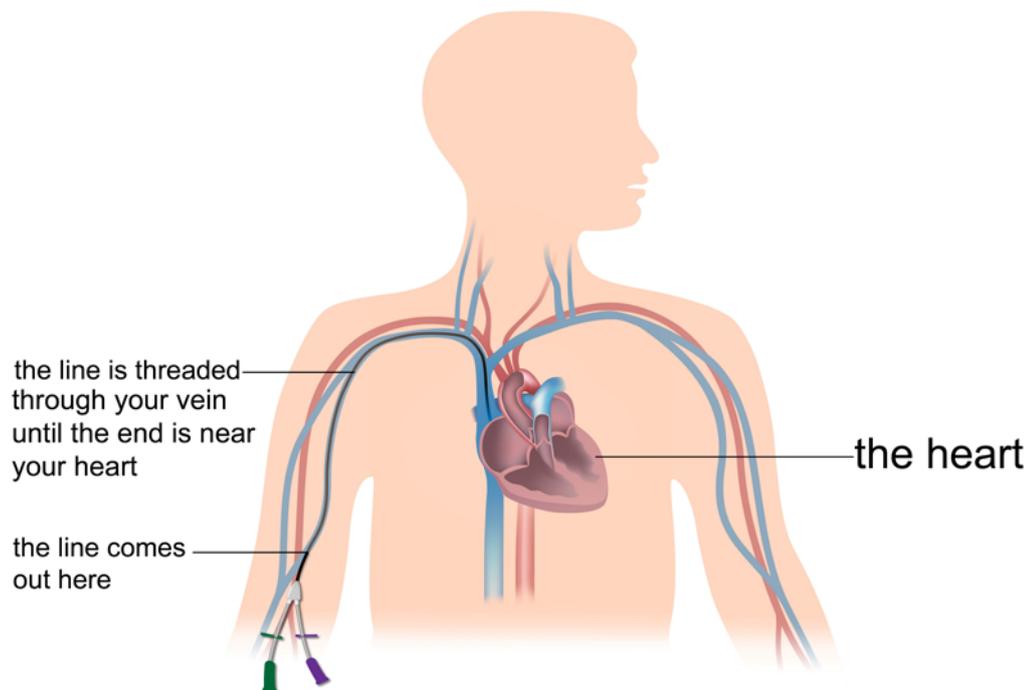
What is a PICC?

A PICC is a peripherally inserted central catheter. It is a thin flexible tube that is inserted into a vein in the upper arm. The PICC is then threaded along the vein so that the tip lies in one of the large veins in the chest.

A specially trained nurse or doctor will insert your PICC. Not all patients are suitable for a PICC, so a nurse will assess you before one is inserted.

The illustration below shows the PICC line, and where it enters the vein at the inside of the upper arm:

Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter (PICC)



Aiila Medical Media/Shutterstock

How is it put in?

Your PICC line will be inserted on the outpatient department. It does not require admission to hospital.

First, the procedure will be explained to you with the opportunity to ask questions before signing a consent form. An ultrasound machine will be used to identify a suitable vein. Once identified the area is numbed with anaesthetic cream. The PICC line is then threaded through the needle, into a large vein that leads to your heart. The needle is removed at the same time. The procedure usually takes about 60 minutes. Occasionally it may be difficult to thread a PICC line. However, most people do not find the procedure painful or uncomfortable.

After your PICC is inserted, you will have a chest x-ray to confirm that your line is in the correct position.

The PICC will be held in place with an adhesive dressing and covered with a clear,

waterproof dressing.

What are the benefits of having a PICC line?

- A PICC can be used to give chemotherapy, anti-cancer drugs, fluids, antibiotics and other drugs directly into the vein. It can also be used for taking blood samples.
- PICC lines are inserted when a central line is needed for short term use.
- They are ideal for people who have small veins which are difficult to find or access, or for people who are very anxious about needles.
- A PICC is sometimes used temporarily for people who should ideally have a tunnelled central venous catheter but are not able to have one because, for example, they are on blood thinning therapy such as Warfarin or Aspirin, have abnormal blood count results, or are unable to lie flat. In this situation, a PICC means treatment can be started without delay.

Are there any alternatives to a PICC line?

If you do not have a suitable vein for a PICC line, a tunnelled central venous catheter or a TIVAD (totally implantable vascular access device) may be considered. Your doctor or nurse specialist will discuss the options with you.

What will happen if I decide not to have a PICC line?

For some treatments, it may be possible to have chemotherapy into a vein in the hand. In most cases, you would then have to be admitted to hospital for the treatment. Some chemotherapy, however, can only be given via a central line, so you would need to discuss treatment options with your doctor.

What are the risks of PICC insertion?

As with most procedures there is a small risk of complications which may include:

- Infection – there is a small risk of infection after having a PICC inserted.
- The catheter tip in the vein may not be in the correct position and sometimes needs to be adjusted into a better position.
- Bleeding and some bruising around the insertion site, especially in people whose blood does not clot normally.
- Accidental puncture of the artery which may cause bleeding.
- Nerve damage – during the procedure you may feel a shooting pain down your arm if the needle touches a nerve.
- It is possible for a blood clot (thrombosis) to form in your vein at the tip of the line or around the line within the vein.

- Split in the PICC line. It is uncommon but occasionally the PICC line can break and split.

Please make sure you have answers to all your questions before you consent to the procedure.

If you have any problems or queries, please contact the chemotherapy helpline on:

FGH - 01229 491288

RLI - 01524 583085

Who will care for it?

While you are in hospital, the nursing staff will look after your PICC. This involves:

- Cleaning the exit site and applying a new dressing weekly.
- Flushing the line weekly to prevent blocking when it is not in use.

When you leave hospital, we will arrange for you to have your line re-dressed and flushed once a week by either the oncology unit or by district nurses. We will also give the district nurse a letter outlining how to care for your PICC and all the equipment needed for the first flush. If you have any problems at home please ring **the chemotherapy helpline**.

Please note that if you experience a cold and shivery attack during or after flushing your line, contact **the chemotherapy helpline**, immediately as this could be the beginning of an infection.

How will I know if something is wrong?

Sometimes problems can occur while you have a PICC line. If you suspect that something is wrong, or if you have any of the following contact the chemotherapy helpline straight away.

- If you have a temperature above 37.5c, fever, chills or generally feel unwell. This could be the beginning of an infection.
- Oozing around the line
- Cracks or leaks in the line.
- Pain, redness or swelling around the site, in your neck, arm or hand – this could be a sign that the line tip has moved and a blood clot has formed in one of the veins. If a clot does form, you will be given some medication to dissolve it.
- If your PICC becomes dislodged

If you are worried about any aspect of your PICC or its appearance, please do not hesitate to contact the chemotherapy helpline on:

FGH - 01229 491288 RLI - 01524 583085

Frequently asked questions

Can I eat and drink before having my PICC inserted?

We recommend a light diet before having your PICC inserted.

Can I have a bath or a shower and swim?

As a general rule we encourage people with PICCs to take a shower rather than a bath because of the risk of infection if the PICC is submerged in bathwater. You should not go swimming whilst you have a PICC line.

Can I lead a normal social life?

Having a PICC in place should not interfere with your social life. However, having chemotherapy may mean that you do not feel like certain social activities immediately after treatment or if your blood counts are low. Your nurse or doctor will give you more specific information.

Can I play sports?

Sports such as tennis or golf or vigorous gym exercises are discouraged. There is a risk that your PICC could become dislodged because of excessive upper body movement. However there are many other pursuits which are acceptable. If in doubt ask your nurse or doctor.

Will my PICC affect my sex life?

Having a PICC in place should not interfere with your sex life. To minimise the risk of damage to your PICC, ensure it is secure before making love. However, sometimes while you are feeling unwell or having cancer treatment you may lose interest in sex.

Adequate barrier contraception is essential during cancer treatment to avoid pregnancy because of the risk of damage to the baby.

How the PICC line is removed:

When you don't need a PICC line any more, it will be taken out. A nurse will usually do this for you in an outpatient department. It will be gently pulled out and the area where the PICC line was put in will be covered with a dressing. This is a painless procedure and only takes a few minutes.

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Other formats

If you would like to receive this information in an alternative format, then please contact : 01539 795497.

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For the best way to plan your journey visit our website:
<http://www.UHMB.nhs.uk/> or contact Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS): 01539 795497.

Useful Contact Details

NHS 111 (for 24 hour urgent health advice): telephone 111

Your Information

If you would like to know how we use, share, disclose and secure your information and your rights of access to the information we hold about you, visit the Trust's website: <http://www.UHMB.nhs.uk/> or contact Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01539 795497.

Evidence

Details of the evidence used in writing this leaflet are available on request from: Patient Information Officer at 01524 512476.

Feedback

We appreciate and encourage feedback. If you need advice or are concerned about any aspect of care or treatment, please speak to a member of staff or contact PALS on 01539 795497.

UHMBT is a no smoking Trust. Smoking is not permitted on any of the hospital sites. You can contact the NHS North Lancashire Stop Smoking services on the number below:

NHS Quit Squad - 0800 328 6297

If you live in Cumbria, please call **0300 013 3000** to find a local pharmacy who are offers 1-2-1 support and nicotine replacement therapy.

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