Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter (PICC)

What is a PICC?
A peripherally inserted central catheter (PICC) is a thin, flexible tube about 20 inches long that is inserted into a vein in your arm. You may hear your cancer care team call it a “pick” line.

Why do I need a PICC?
A PICC allows your cancer care team to give treatments such as antibiotics, high-calorie liquids, chemotherapy, and blood transfusions. It is also used as a way to get samples of your blood. This is easier on you than getting an IV or needle poke each visit.

How is a PICC put in place?
A specially trained team places your PICC. They insert a needle into a vein in your arm above the bend of the elbow. The PICC goes through the needle into the vein, then the needle is removed. The end of the PICC sits in a large vein just above the heart. You will have an x-ray to make sure the end of the PICC is in the right place. One or more tubes called lumens come out of your arm. Each lumen has an injection cap that lets medicine be put into the catheter. Blood samples can also be drawn through the injection caps. A PICC can stay in place for weeks.

Care of the PICC Dressing
A clear dressing and an anchor device hold the PICC in place. Your health care team or home health nurse will change the dressing 24 hours after the PICC line is placed. After that, they will change the dressing every 7 days or when it gets soiled or loose.

Only a trained professional should change the dressing. You should NEVER touch the insertion site or PICC under the dressing. Call your health care team if your dressing gets soiled or loose, or if moisture appears under the clear dressing.

How can I keep my PICC from getting infected?
- Make sure your hands are clean before touching the exposed part of your PICC. You can use soap and warm water or an alcohol-based hand gel.
- Be sure anyone touching the PICC has clean hands.
- BEFORE using the injection cap, scrub it well for 15 seconds with an alcohol wipe.
- Follow the guidelines below to care for your PICC.

Caring for Your PICC

Bathing. You may shower with your PICC in place. Wrap the insertion site with plastic wrap and tape to keep it dry. NEVER let the insertion site be underwater. When you take off the plastic wrap and tape, be careful not to remove the dressing or lift the edge of it.

Flushing the PICC

When to do it. Your PICC needs to be washed out or “flushed” every day with a heparin solution. Heparin is a medicine that keeps blood clots from blocking the tube inside your body. Nurses will show you how to do this. Tell your cancer care team if you are allergic to heparin.

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**How to Flush the PICC.** Always use a 10-mL syringe to flush your PICC. Home health care will provide you with pre-filled syringes. Follow these steps:

1. **Wash your hands with soap and warm water.**
2. **Scrub the injection cap well with an alcohol wipe for 15 seconds.**
3. **Remove the cap from the syringe. Twist the syringe tip into the injection cap at the end of the PICC.**
4. **Unclamp the PICC and push all of the saline or heparin into the PICC using the “push and pause” method—your nurse will show you how to do it. NEVER USE FORCE to flush it.**
5. **Reclamp the PICC after flushing. The PICC clamps should always be closed when the line is not in use to prevent air getting in or blood leaking out.**

If the PICC has more than one lumen, repeat the flushing steps for each one. Use a new syringe for each lumen.

**If you use your PICC to take medicines,** you also need to flush it with normal saline before and after each dose. Normal saline is a liquid that helps keep the PICC line clean.

1. **Flush with 10 mL of normal saline BEFORE each dose.**
2. **AFTER your dose of medicine, flush the catheter with 10-20 mL of normal saline.**
3. **THEN flush with 3 mL of heparin.**

**If Your PICC Will Not Flush**

Check to make sure the PICC clamp is open.

If the clamp is open, your PICC may be plugged. Call your cancer care team. They can use medicine to unblock the line.

**Watch for These Signs**

Some side effects may happen in the arm with the PICC in the first 10 days after placement:

- Bruising
- Pain or tenderness
- Redness
- Slight swelling

Put a warm pad on your arm as soon as these signs appear. For the next three days, apply heat for about 30 minutes four to five times daily. Your arm should feel better within one to two days. If the symptoms get worse, call your cancer care team.

If you have any of the following signs, call your cancer care team right away at the number below:

- Bleeding, drainage, or leaking where the PICC goes into your arm
- Chills
- Fever higher than 100.3°F

**Activity Limits**

- Avoid activities with repetitive arm motion such as golf, tennis, or pushing a vacuum. These motions could move the catheter out of place.
- Do not let the arm with the PICC be under water. Avoid swimming and soaking in hot tubs or saunas. The PICC dressing must stay dry.
- Do not lift anything heavier than 10 pounds. A gallon of milk weighs about 8 pounds.
- Avoid any activity that causes you to sweat.

**If the PICC Comes Out**

If your PICC comes completely or partly out of your arm, do not panic. Cover the area with gauze and apply gentle pressure until bleeding stops. Put a bandage over the area and call your cancer care team.

If your PICC pulls out during an infusion, stop the pump or infusion. Cover the area with a clean towel if the sterile dressing has moved or torn. Call your cancer care team.

**How is the PICC removed?**

When you no longer need the PICC, a nurse will remove it. It is painless and takes only a few minutes. Keep the bandage over the PICC site for 24 hours. Call your health care team if you have any of these signs:

- Bleeding or drainage around the PICC site
- Redness
- Swelling
- Tenderness

**If You Have Questions or Problems with the PICC**

Call your cancer care team at this number:

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After hours, weekends, or holidays, call 801-587-7000 and ask for the oncologist on call.