Patient & Family Guide
2015

PICC Line
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**What is a PICC line?**
A PICC (Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter) line is a long intravenous (IV) catheter (tube) that is placed into a large vein in your arm and threaded into a large vein just above your heart.

*Picture used with permission from Hamilton Health Sciences, “PICC - Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter” pamphlet.*

**Why do I need a PICC line?**
You may need a PICC line for long-term IV fluids or medication.
What are the benefits of having a PICC line?

• It decreases the number of needle punctures needed.
• It can be used for a long period of time.
• It can be used for home IV therapy.
• It is less irritating for your vein.
• It is easy to remove when it is no longer needed.

Where do I go to get a PICC line?

A PICC line will be inserted in your hospital room or in the radiology (X-ray) department. A PICC line can be put in by a doctor or a specially trained nurse.

How will my PICC line be put in?

• Your arm will be cleaned and you will be covered with special cloths to keep the area as clean as possible.
• A medicine to numb the area (freezing) will be given where the line will enter your arm. This is done with a very small needle and may sting.
• The doctor will then insert the PICC line. You
may feel a slight pushing sensation.

- After the PICC line is inserted, it will be held in place with a locking device or stitches.
- A sterile dressing will be put over the PICC line site.
- The procedure takes about 1 hour.

**What will happen after the procedure?**

- You may have a little bleeding around the insertion site. This usually stops after a few hours.

- You may feel sore and have some redness around the insertion site. This is a normal part of healing and will usually go away in 24 to 48 hours. A warm compress 4 times a day for 10 minutes may help ease the soreness. If the redness does not go away or gets worse contact your doctor.

- Raise your arm on pillows when you are sitting or lying down to decrease swelling.
What are the possible problems when inserting a PICC line?

• There is a small chance that the doctor may not be able to put the PICC line in.
• There is a small chance of injuring the area around the vein.
• If the PICC line is inserted while you are in your hospital bed, the position may need to be changed after an X-ray is taken.
• There may be a change in your heart rhythm. This is uncommon.

What are the risks of having a PICC line?

• You may feel sore and have some redness around the insertion site.
• There is a chance of infection.
• The PICC line may become blocked and need to be treated or replaced.
• IV fluid from the PICC line may leak into the tissue.
• The PICC line may break (uncommon).
• A blood clot may form around the PICC line (uncommon).
Care of your PICC line
Your nurse will care for your PICC line.
• The dressing will be changed the day after the PICC line is put in and then once a week.
• The special cap on the end of the PICC line will be changed regularly.
• The PICC line will be flushed regularly to keep it from getting blocked.
• If you are discharged home, plans will be made to have the dressing and cap changed by a nurse.

How do I care for my PICC line at home?
Every day, you should check:
• The cap to make sure it is tight.
• The dressing to make sure it is secure on your skin.
• The PICC line site for redness, pain, swelling, tenderness and/or drainage.
• Your arm and neck on the side of the PICC line for swelling and/or pain.
• That the clamp on your PICC line is closed when not in use (some PICCs do not have clamps).
Remember:

• Wash your hands before and after touching your supplies or PICC line.

• Keep the area around the PICC line clean and dry. The dressing will need to be changed any time it gets loose, soiled or wet.

• Keep supplies for your PICC line in a clean, dry place. Supplies are sterile and should only be opened by a nurse.

• To prevent your PICC line from getting blocked, try not to bend your arm for long periods of time.

• To help prevent your PICC line from getting caught on things, wear long sleeves or gauze netting over the PICC line site.

• If you need help walking, use a walker instead of crutches.

• Do not use safety pins or scissors near the PICC line.

• Always carry the PICC line wallet card with you. Talk about the need for MedicAlert identification with your health care provider.

• Always carry your Health Card.
What activities can I do with a PICC line?

• Bending your arm, reaching and doing everyday activities will not harm your PICC line.

• You should not lift heavy objects or carry objects that may put a strain on your PICC line or dressing.

• If you want to have a bath or shower, wrap the PICC line and dressing with plastic wrap or a plastic bag. Tape the plastic covering on all sides to keep the PICC line from getting wet during your bath or shower. Remove the plastic immediately after the bath/shower. If you have a bath, do not put your arm under the water.

• You cannot go swimming or in a hot tub with a PICC line. A wet dressing or catheter may put you at risk for infection.

• Avoid weight lifting or contact sports. If you aren’t sure if an activity is OK, check with your doctor or nurse.
Contact your nurse or clinic right away if:

- The PICC line site is red, warm, painful, swollen or draining fluid.
- There is an increasing amount of blood on your dressing.
- The PICC line is getting longer. If this happens, do not use the PICC line. Leave it in place and tape it to your skin. It will need to be replaced.
- The catheter falls out. If this happens, put pressure on the PICC line site with a clean towel and go to the closest emergency room right away.
- You feel pain or discomfort when IV fluids are put into your PICC line.
- You have fever, chills or vomiting that is new.
- You feel tired or weak for more than 24 hours.
- There are blisters on the skin near your PICC line site.

If you can’t reach your nurse or clinic, go to the closest emergency room.

If you have a fever higher than 38°C, call your doctor right away. If you can’t get to your family doctor or do not have one, go to the closest emergency room.
What do I do if the PICC line breaks or is damaged?

• If the PICC line breaks, bend the catheter back on itself between the break and where it enters your skin right away.

• Secure the PICC line to your arm with tape or a rubber band.

• If there is not enough catheter to bend it back on itself, gently (do not use force) pull 2.5 to 5 cm (1-2 inches) of the PICC line out from where it enters the skin, then bend it back on itself and tape it securely to your arm.

• Go directly to your closest emergency room, as the PICC line will need to be repaired or replaced.

Call 911 if you have:

• Pain or swelling in your arm, neck, shoulder or chest on the side of your body that has the PICC line.

• Trouble breathing or chest pain that is getting worse over time.
How will my PICC line be removed?

Your PICC line will be removed when it is no longer needed or if there is a problem with it. The PICC line will be removed at your bedside or at a clinic by a nurse or doctor. This does not usually hurt. A dressing will be placed over the site where the PICC line has been removed.