



Patient & Family Guide
2021

PICC Line

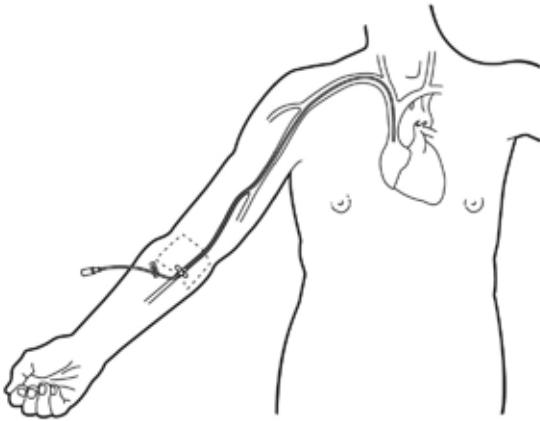


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PICC Line

What is a PICC line?

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



Why do I need a PICC line?

You may need a PICC line for long-term IV therapy of fluids and medication(s).

What are the benefits of having a PICC line?

- It lowers the number of needle punctures needed.
- It can be used for a long time.
- It can be used for IV therapy at home.
- 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 doctor or specially trained nurse will insert (put in) your PICC line in your hospital room or in the radiology (X-ray) department.

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.
- You will be given medication to numb the area (freezing) where the PICC line will enter your arm. This is done with a very small needle and may sting.
- You may notice a feeling of slight pressure or pushing as the catheter is inserted.

- The PICC line will be held in place with a device to keep it stable and a dressing to keep the area clean. This will lower the risk of infection.
- The procedure usually takes about 1 hour.

What will happen after the procedure?

- You may have a little bleeding around the insertion site (where the IV enters your arm). 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 (1 to 2 days). **If the redness does not go away or gets worse, tell your primary health care provider.**
- You may notice some swelling. To help the swelling go down, rest your arm on raised pillows above the level of your heart when you are sitting or lying down.

What are the risks of inserting a PICC line?

- There is a small chance of bruising at the insertion site.
- There may be a change in your heart rhythm for a few seconds. This is not common.
- We may not be able to thread the catheter into the vein. If this happens, we will use your other arm.

What are the risks of having a PICC line?

- There is a chance of infection.
- The PICC line may become blocked. If this happens, you may need medication or the PICC line may need to be replaced.
- IV fluid from the PICC line may leak into your skin. If this happens, the fluid will be absorbed by your body.
- The PICC line may break. This is not common.

Care of your PICC line

In the hospital, your nurse will care for your PICC line. At home, a community nurse will visit to care for your PICC line.

- The dressing may be changed the day after your PICC line is inserted, and then once a week.
- The dressing will also need to be changed any time it gets loose, soiled, or wet.
- The cap on the end of your PICC line will be changed once a week.
- When your PICC line is not being used, it must be flushed once a week to keep it from getting blocked. When it is being used for IV therapy, it must be flushed more often.

How do I care for my PICC line at home?

Every day, you should:

- Check the cap to make sure it is tight.
- Check the dressing to make sure it is secure on your skin, and not getting loose.
- Check for signs of infection (like redness, pain, swelling, tenderness, and/or drainage at the insertion site).
- Check your arm and neck on the side of the PICC line for swelling and/or pain.

Remember:

- Always wash your hands before and after touching your supplies or the PICC line.
- Keep the area around your PICC line clean and dry.
- Keep supplies for your PICC line in a clean, dry place. Supplies should only be opened by a nurse.
- To help prevent your PICC line from getting caught, wear long sleeves or gauze netting where the PICC line goes into your arm.
- If you need help walking, use a walker instead of crutches.
- Do not use safety pins or scissors near your PICC line.
- **Always carry your PICC line wallet card with you.** This card is given to you after your PICC line is inserted.

What activities can I do with a PICC line?

Most everyday activities are OK.

- You can bend your arm and reach normally.
- You can have a bath or shower. **Make sure you wrap your PICC line and dressing with plastic wrap or a plastic bag first.** Tape the plastic covering on all sides to keep the PICC line from getting wet. When you are finished, **remove the plastic right away.**
- **Do not get your PICC line wet.** A wet dressing or catheter may put you at risk for infection.
 - › If you have a bath, **do not put your arm under the water.**
 - › **Do not go swimming or in a hot tub with your PICC line.**
- Avoid heavy lifting and contact sports.

If you are not sure if an activity is OK, ask your health care provider.

Contact your primary health care provider right away if:

- The insertion site is red, warm, painful, swollen, or draining fluid
- There is more and more 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 insertion site with a clean towel and **go to the nearest Emergency Department right away**.
- You feel pain or discomfort when IV fluids are put into your PICC line
- You have new fever, chills, or vomiting (throwing up)
- You feel tired or weak for more than 24 hours
- You have blisters on your skin near the insertion site

If you cannot reach your nurse or clinic, go to the nearest Emergency Department.

If you have a fever higher than 38° C (101.4° F), call your primary health care provider right away. If you cannot reach your primary health care provider or do not have one, go to the nearest Emergency Department.

Call 911 if you have:

- › pain or swelling in your arm, neck, shoulder, or chest on the side of the PICC line.
- › trouble breathing or chest pain that is getting worse.

What do I do if the PICC line breaks or is damaged?

If your PICC line breaks or is damaged:

1. Bend the catheter back on itself between the break and where it enters your skin.
2. 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 pull 2.5 to 5 cm (1 to 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.
3. Go to the nearest Emergency Department right away.

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 hospital bedside or at a clinic by a nurse or doctor. This does not hurt.
- A dressing will be placed over the site where the PICC line was removed. Leave the dressing in place for 24 hours, then remove gently.
- Keep the site clean and dry as it heals.

**What are your questions? Please ask.
We are here to help you.**

**In Nova Scotia you can call 811 to talk with
a registered nurse about your health care
questions 24/7.**

Notes:

Looking for more health information?

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here: <https://library.nshealth.ca/PatientEducation>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time: call 811 or visit <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit <http://ns.211.ca>

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Please do not use perfumed products. Thank you!

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.