

Information for Patients and Carers

Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter (PICC)

A decorative graphic at the bottom of the page consisting of three overlapping, wavy bands of blue. The top band is a light blue, the middle is a medium blue, and the bottom is a dark blue.

What is a Peripherally Inserted Central Venous Catheter (PICC)?

A PICC is a long narrow, hollow tube which is inserted into one of the veins in your arm. The tip or end of the PICC is located in a large vein in your chest (vena cava), just above your heart. The other end of the PICC comes out of the arm by about 5cm.

Why do I need a PICC?

A PICC is used to administer medications, chemotherapy, nutrition, antibiotics or fluids which need to be given intravenously (directly into a vein). The PICC can also be used to take blood samples, reducing the need for needles in the arm. If cared for appropriately the PICC can remain in place for six to eight months.

Before the procedure

You may require some blood tests before the procedure to ensure it is safe to proceed. Certain medications may need to be stopped prior to the procedure and this will be discussed with you at a triage assessment before your appointment date. The procedure will be discussed with you in length and if you are happy to go ahead you will be asked to sign a written consent form.

What happens during the procedure?

The doctor/nurse practitioner will scan your arm using an ultrasound machine so that they can see the veins inside your arms. This will help to determine where to insert the PICC.

The procedure uses x-rays, which is a form of radiation, to help guide in the placement of the PICC and confirm the correct position.

There are some small risks involved with x-rays but only the minimum amount of radiation is used to produce the images required. We use the smallest dose possible, in line with national regulations.

For the procedure you will be required to lie flat on the x-ray table with your arm outstretched onto a board.

Your arm will be cleaned with antiseptic solution and covered with a sterile drape.

The doctor/nurse practitioner will then inject local anaesthetic to numb the insertion site.

Although you should not feel any pain during the procedure, you may at times feel some pressure.

The procedure takes approximately 20-30 minutes.

A transparent, breathable dressing will be applied over the insertion site to secure the PICC, along with an anchoring/securing device.

What are the risks of the procedure?

This procedure has a small risk of complications. The doctor/nurse practitioner will go through these with you in detail.

Infection – There is a small risk of infection following the insertion of a PICC.

Bleeding and bruising – There can occasionally be some bleeding and bruising around the insertion site.

Thrombus or clot – This can form around the PICC, causing the patient to have a painful swollen arm. If this happens you must report it immediately to the team looking after you or go to your local Emergency Department.

Malposition – In some cases the PICC can move and therefore the tip is no longer in a satisfactory position. The position needs to be confirmed using a chest x-ray and then the decision will be made as to whether the PICC is still safe to use or needs removing.

Failure to insert the PICC – There is a small chance that it may not be possible to place the PICC; this will require further discussions with

yourself and the referring team as to what the best options are in order for you to have your treatment.

What happens after the procedure?

After the procedure it is not uncommon to feel some slight discomfort or an ache in your arm where the PICC was inserted; if required take your usual painkillers (following the medication guidelines). You should avoid strenuous activities, such as golf or tennis, while the PICC is in place, as these activities may dislodge or accidentally pull the PICC out.

Who looks after my PICC?

The care of the PICC is often performed by district nurses and/or the referring team (nutritional team, oncology team, OPAT etc.). They will clean, re-dress and flush the PICC on a weekly basis. When you are home it is important that the transparent dressing is kept clean and dry at all times; this will help to prevent infections.

How and when is the PICC removed?

PICCs are easily removed; the dressing will be taken off and the PICC will be gently pulled out. Compression will be applied for a few minutes over the site; the wound will heal naturally.

Contact details

Should you require further advice or information please contact your specialist nurse or referring team or you can contact us in IRDU between 8.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday, on **01772 522343**.

Sources of further information

www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk

www.nhs.uk

www.accessable.co.uk

www.patient.co.uk

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ionising-radiation-from-medical-imaging-examinations-safety-advice/exposure-to-ionising-radiation-from-medical-imaging-safety-advice>

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