

Insertion of a PICC catheter

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The evidence used in the preparation of this leaflet is available on request. Please email: patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk if you would like a reference list.

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What is a PICC catheter?

PICC stands for peripherally inserted central catheter and is a soft, flexible tube (catheter) made from either silicone or polyurethane, which is inserted into a vein in the arm. It is used to give fluids, drugs and blood products. It is also used to take blood samples. It is often called a PICC line.

How long is it in for?

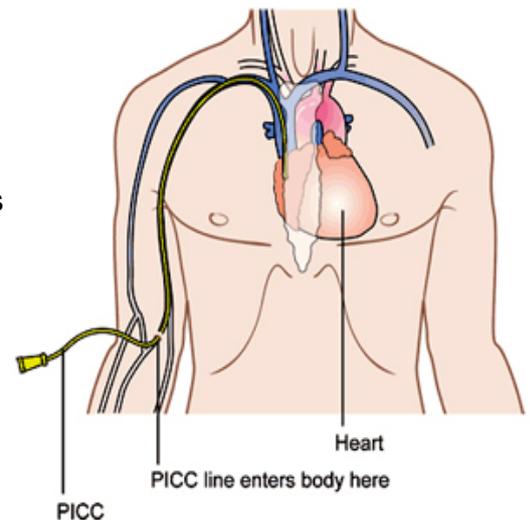
The PICC line is left in for several weeks or months, depending on the type of therapy prescribed for you.

How is the PICC catheter inserted?

A PICC line is usually inserted in the X-ray department, theatre or at the patient's bedside. The PICC catheter is inserted into the vein just above the bend in your arm. The catheter tip will be positioned near the heart.

Local anaesthetic is used to numb the skin. When the skin is completely numb, a needle is inserted into the vein, using ultrasound guidance. The PICC line will be threaded through this into a large vein just above the heart. The needle is then removed.

Other than a sting from the local anaesthetic, the procedure is painless. The position of the catheter is confirmed using X-rays. When the doctor is sure that the line is in the right place, the winged portion of the catheter is secured to the skin using an adhesive. The whole procedure should take approximately 15 minutes.



What are the risks or complications?

Infection

It is possible for an infection to develop where the line goes into the vein or for the line itself to become infected. You should contact your hospital doctor or nurse if:

- the insertion area becomes red, swollen or painful
- you notice discoloured fluid coming from the area

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- you develop a temperature
- your arm itself becomes swollen or tender.

If an infection develops you will probably be given antibiotics. If these don't clear the infection, or if the infection is serious, the line may be removed.

Blood clots

It is possible for a blood clot (thrombosis) to form in your vein around the line. If a clot does form, you will be given some medication to dissolve it, and your line may have to be removed.

Signs of a blood clot around the PICC include swelling, redness or tenderness in your arm, chest area or up into your neck (on the same side as the PICC line).

Thrombophlebitis

The line may irritate the vein resulting in redness and soreness. This is treated with simple pain killers, but you must be checked by your doctor to confirm this and make sure there is no infection or clots in the vein.

The line may come out

The PICC line is not secured in place so there is a small risk that it might get pulled out. To avoid the line coming out by accident it should always be taped or covered with a dressing. If it does come out, press firmly on the hole in your skin for ten minutes, apply a plaster or dressing and contact your doctor.

Break or cut in the PICC line

It's important that the PICC line is not cut or split. Do not use scissors near the PICC line. It is uncommon to get a cut or split in the line, but in the unlikely event of this happening, contact the hospital immediately, as it may need to be removed if it can't be repaired.

Radiation dose

The radiation dose is about the same as the average person receives from background radiation over 3 days. Special precautions are taken to keep the radiation dose to a minimum.

Is there any special preparation?

No.

What happens after the examination?

You will given an appointment to see a nurse to show you how to care for your PICC line.

How the PICC line is removed

When you no longer need a PICC line it will be taken out. A nurse will usually do this for you in an outpatient department. It will be gently pulled out. This is a painless procedure that takes only a few minutes.