

## ***Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter (PICC)***

### **Introduction**

A Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter, or PICC line, is a thin, long, soft plastic tube inserted into a vein of the arm. It is long enough to reach the large vein that enters the heart. It is used when a patient needs intravenous treatment for a long time.

Your doctor may have recommended that you have a PICC line inserted. The decision to have this procedure is also yours.

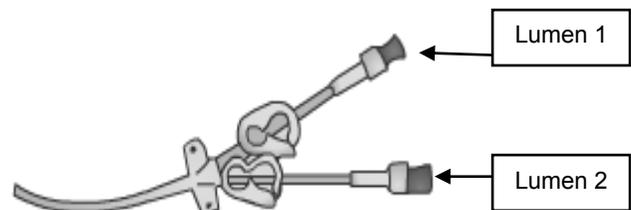
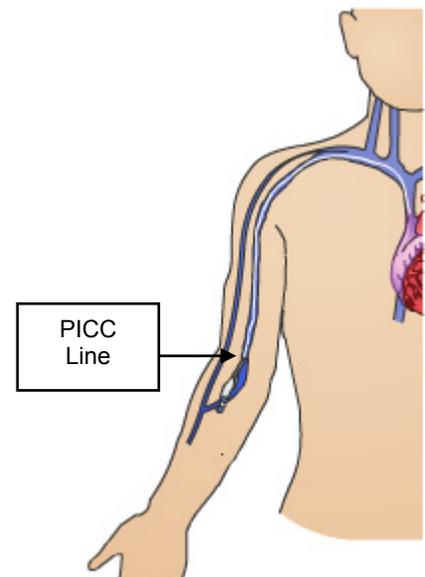
This reference summary explains the benefits and risks of a PICC line. It also discusses how to take care of it.

### **PICC Line**

IV stands for intravenous. Intravenous means into the veins. IV therapy is treatment that is delivered directly inside the veins. This allows medications, fluids and nutrients to circulate immediately in the blood.

The PICC line is a thin, long, soft plastic tube that functions as an IV line that is inserted in your arm. It is usually inserted near the bend of the elbow or in the upper arm. The PICC line is threaded up to a large vein above the heart where there is rapid and high volume of blood flow.

The catheter may have one or more openings through which medications or nutrients are administered. Each opening is called a lumen, which is like a long tunnel that runs the whole length of the catheter.



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A specially trained nurse places the catheter at the bedside or a doctor places the catheter in the radiology, or x-ray, department. After the procedure, a chest x-ray will be taken to make sure the catheter tip is in the right place.

## Procedure

A specially trained nurse or doctor will insert the catheter in a sterile setting. The nurse or doctor will wear a gown, mask, cap and sterile gloves. The vein for the catheter placement will be found. You may be given an injection of lidocaine to numb your skin. You will feel a pinprick and slight burning. When the area is numb, the insertion of the catheter will start.



The PICC is placed through the skin and into a vein in the arm using a needle. An ultrasound machine may be used to view the veins in the arm. When using the ultrasound, a sterile gel is applied to the skin. A probe with a sterile cover is moved up the arm, allowing the veins to be viewed on a small screen monitor.

A small nick will be made in the skin to allow the nurse or doctor to place the dilator and needle. The procedure should take about 1 hour. You may feel some tenderness after the procedure. This usually goes away in about 24 to 48 hours.

The catheter lumens must be flushed to keep the inside of the catheter clean and free flowing. While you are in the hospital, a nurse will flush the line. If you go home with your PICC line, you will receive instructions on how to care for your PICC line at home and have a chance to practice before you are discharged.



Your PICC line dressing will be changed 7 days after the line is inserted. It will be changed sooner if it is bloody or if it becomes loose. The weekly dressing change will be done in the clinic, or a home health nurse will come to your home, if you are homebound.

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Hand washing is very important. Clean hands reduce the chance of infection. Washing your hands will kill any germs that may be on your hands. It is all right to remind the health care team to wash their hands before touching the catheter.

## Understanding the Risks

Inserting a PICC line is a safe procedure. But, like any invasive procedure, there are risks associated with the insertion and maintenance of this catheter. While the risk of developing complications is low, your health care provider will take precautions to try to prevent them.

You may experience mild discomfort with the insertion of the introducer needle into your vein. Risks associated with the insertion procedure will be discussed in this section. If your veins have become scarred or partially clotted from having many IVs, it is possible that this type of IV catheter cannot be successfully inserted. Occasionally, the nurse or doctor is unable to access the vein in one arm. If this happens, the other arm may be used.



Puncture of an artery, nerve or tendon near the insertion site may occur during insertion. The catheter may need to be repositioned if you develop an irregular heartbeat or if the catheter goes into an unintended vein.

## Risks after the Insertion

The catheter can move out of position in the vein with excessive coughing, vigorous movement or severe vomiting. This may require removal or repositioning of the catheter. The PICC can move out of position if it is not secured. There is a risk of thrombosis, or blood clotting in the vein. Notify your nurse or physician if you have swelling or pain in your arm or neck.

You may develop an infection at the insertion site or in your bloodstream. This may require removal of the catheter and antibiotic treatment. Phlebitis, or vein inflammation, can occur in the vein. The PICC line can become obstructed with a clot that limits or prevents use of the line. This can usually be cleared and does not mean the PICC line has to be replaced. You may need to come in to have the line declotted. A piece of the catheter could break off and travel into the bloodstream.

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## Benefits of the PICC

A PICC can remain in place for many weeks or months if needed. It can be used at home, in the hospital or in a skilled nursing facility.

The risk of infection is low with a PICC. You can receive fluids for hydration or nutrition, blood transfusions and a variety of medications, such as chemotherapy or antibiotics. Some PICC lines may be used to obtain blood for most laboratory tests. However, the nurse may choose not to draw blood from the PICC line if there is a risk of altering the function of the catheter. Laboratory personnel cannot use the PICC line for blood tests.

## Limitations

You may not be able to do certain activities that involve using your arm a lot. You cannot soak your arm in water. You must cover the insertion site with clear plastic and tape before showering.

You may not be able to use under-the-arm crutches. The PICC arm cannot be used for blood pressure (BP) monitoring.

## Summary

A Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter, or PICC line, is a thin, long, soft plastic tube inserted into a vein of the arm. It is long enough to reach the large vein that enters the heart. It is used when a patient needs intravenous treatment for a long time.

A PICC line can be used at home, in the hospital or at a skilled nursing facility. It allows you to receive fluids for hydration and a variety of IV medications, such as chemotherapy or antibiotics. A PICC line may be left in place longer than other IV lines. It helps to save veins and has less risk of catheter infection.

Like any invasive procedure, a PICC line has certain risks. Learning about them will help you to make a decision about having the procedure.

Your health care team is available to answer questions about your particular PICC line and how to care for it.



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