

# PICCs

## A Patient's Guide

(Peripherally Inserted Central venous Catheter)



Salisbury  
NHS Foundation Trust

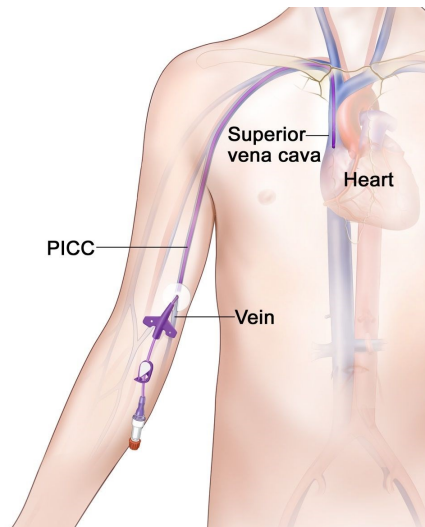


For further  
advice or help  
please contact the  
emergency line:  
01722 341930

## What is a PICC?

A PICC (**P**eripherally **I**nserted **C**entral venous **C**atheter) is a long, flexible tube used for giving intravenous therapies.

It enters a large peripheral vein above the elbow and is threaded into a large central vein (the superior vena cava) which drains blood into the heart. There are different types of PICCs but the principle is the same.



## What is a PICC for and what are the advantages?

Many drugs can cause irritation and damage to smaller veins, but when a PICC is placed in a large vein, the drugs are diluted by the blood and less likely to cause problems. We also recommend a PICC if you don't have very good veins in the lower arm.

The PICC provides a safe way of administering most intravenous therapies including chemotherapy, antibiotics, blood products and liquid foods (nutrition). Blood samples can also be taken through the PICC, so there should be little need to use needles for your blood tests.

## Are all PICCs the same?

The PICCs we use at Salisbury NHS Foundation Trust, can have one or two lumens (tubes), the Nurse or Doctor will explain to you which type of PICC you will have and why we recommend this PICC for your treatment.

There are three different types of PICCs used within our hospital. They differ slightly by appearance, though there is little difference in the care of them and potential problems. Once inserted and properly looked after, the PICC can be left in place for 6 months or longer.

## How is a PICC inserted?

Prior to commencing the procedure, there will be time to answer any questions you may have.

The procedure usually takes around an hour but this can be longer.

A lightweight sensor will be placed on your chest, along with two sticky dots to view your heart rhythm. This helps to confirm that the catheter tip is in the correct position.

The insertion of the PICC is not an operation but the person inserting your catheter will treat this as a sterile (very clean) procedure. They will wear a sterile gown, sterile gloves and prepare sterile equipment. Your skin will be cleaned with an antiseptic, after which sterile drapes will be placed over your arm and body. Local anaesthetic will be used to minimise discomfort whilst the PICC is being inserted.

We do use equipment which eliminates the need for an x-ray for most patients, though some patients may require a chest x-ray following the procedure. Once the position has been confirmed, you are able to receive treatment through the PICC straightaway if needed.

## How will the PICC affect my life?

### General Advice -

The PICC may put some restrictions on your lifestyle, but these should hopefully be minimal and will only affect you whilst the PICC is in.

Much of the advice and care is directed at preventing your PICC from becoming infected, blocked or accidentally pulled out. If the dressing becomes loose, please contact us for that we can organise a dressing change.

It is important for everyone who touches your PICC line to wash their hands. Only trained staff can access your line.

The greatest risk of infection is in the first two weeks after the PICC has been inserted; the greatest risk of a blockage is when the PICC hasn't been used in some time.

Although the PICC is intended for long term use, they can easily be damaged if not correctly cared for. Do not pull the PICC as this may lead to it being dislodged or damaged.

**It is very important you drink plenty whilst you have a PICC in, this will avoid the risk of developing blood clots.**

### Bathing

Whilst your PICC line is in place you should avoid getting it wet. To avoid this, a dressing should be always in place. A little water will not harm the PICC, though when having a shower or bath it is best not to allow the end of the PICC to dangle in the bath. Do not submerge the arm with a PICC line while having a bath. At the PICC insertion appointment, you will be provided with a LIMBO cover to be used when showering or bathing to protect your PICC line from getting wet. This is reusable. If the dressing gets wet, contact us so that we can organise a dressing change.



## **Swimming and Exercise -**

You should not swim with a PICC line due to the risk of infection. Contact sports such as martial arts, rugby and wrestling are best to be avoided too as the PICC may get pulled. Golf, tennis and other similar activities which involve a lot of arm swinging and elbow bending are probably best avoided. Other forms of exercise such as housework, walking, dancing, cycling and running should pose little if any risk to your PICC line. If you have any questions or doubt please ask for advice. Exercise whilst having treatment is beneficial, you should not allow the PICC to stop you from participating in your hobbies unless it is absolutely necessary .

## **What care does the PICC require?**

The PICC will require some simple care in order to prevent it becoming infected or blocked. We will arrange for much of this care to be completed by the community nurse or family members, where they feel happy to do some and have undergone some training. If required, line care can also be completed on the Pembroke Suite and MCCU.

Whenever the PICC is dressed, flushed or used, whoever is doing this should check the length of the PICC against the measurement you were given at insertion (EXIT LENGTH). If this differs it could mean that the PICC have come out a bit and therefore you should contact the team at Salisbury Hospital.

## **Dressing the PICC -**

The PICC is held in place with a dressing. For the first week or so the dressing may need to be changed frequently . After the first week it should only need changing weekly. Sterile gloves and dressings should be used to avoid the risk of infection. We will give you the supplies needed for this.

The PICC is secured in place by an orange plastic and metal device, called SecurAcath. The aim is to prevent the PICC getting pulled.

Further supplies for caring for you PICC can be provided by the hospital or GP if agreed, just let us know should you need this.

## Flushing the PICC -

The tubes of your PICC need to be flushed at least once a week. If you are attending the hospital then this can be done there (please book an appointment prior to attending), otherwise we will arrange for a community nurse to do so.

## Common problems with PICCs -

A lot of patients will have a PICC without any problems at all and in balance the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. Once the line has been in a few days any initial discomfort should have resolved. Problems can occur whilst the PICC is in, it is important that any such problems are dealt with promptly. If you feel there are any problems with the PICC you should contact the hospital immediately. The most likely problems are infection, mechanical phlebitis, thrombus (blood clot) and movement of the PICC. It is important to contact us if any of these problems occur on **01722 341930**

## Mechanical Phlebitis-

Although the PICC may initially cause some mild irritation along the vein, this usually passes within a day or two. More significant irritation is known as mechanical phlebitis. It may start as an aching feeling in the arm or redness along the line in the vein. This is when the PICC irritates the vein and causes inflammation and pain within the vein. It is more common in women and those with smaller veins, and can be easily confused with infection.

Mechanical phlebitis can be relieved or largely prevented by placing a heat pad over the affected area for 20-30 minutes four times a day during the first week.

The pain is usually well controlled with Paracetamol or other analgesics such as Ibuprofen.

## Infection

Infection can happen at any time so if you notice any pus on the dressing, discomfort or inflammation (redness) around the entry site it is likely that the PICC is infected. You should contact the hospital immediately.

If you develop a temperature of 38°C or above, or below 36°C, or you experience chills and shivering, you should contact us immediately as this is a sign of infection on **01722 341930**

## Thrombosis (blood clot)

On rare occasions, a blood clot can collect around the catheter. This would normally result in additional medical treatment. If your arm with the PICC becomes swollen or painful you must contact the hospital immediately on **01722 341930**. This can occur depending on other factors such as your diagnosis and treatment. Evidence shows that by having the PICC in your dominant arm, keeping warm and staying well hydrated reduces the risk of this happening.

## PICC movement

Despite our best efforts in securing the PICC it may sometimes move out of the vein. If this happens it may prevent your treatment from being safely administered. You should try to ensure your PICC is not accidentally pulled and that it is secured with a tubular dressing whenever possible. If you feel that the line is coming out of the vein please try to secure the line with some adhesive tape and contact the hospital immediately on **01722 341930**.

## Blocked Catheter -

Regular flushing with saline by the nursing team will reduce the chance of your PICC blocking. However, sometimes your catheter may block; this will prevent the catheter from being used. We may be able to unblock it, but if it cannot be unblocked, it may need to be replaced.

### **WRITE ANY QUERIES YOU MAY HAVE HERE:**

**Please CONTACT US on 01722 341930 if any of the following occurs or you have any other worries**

- Fluid leaks out of the PICC or the exit wound
- Discomfort when the PICC is flushed
- You are unable to flush the PICC
- You get a temperature 38°C or above, or below 36°C and/or rigors (shiver and shakes)
- Pus at the entry point
- Soreness at the entry site or upper arm
- It looks like the PICC is coming out of your arm
- Swelling in the arm or chest pain
- Bleeding

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