

Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter

A Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter (PICC) is a long, flexible tube (catheter) that is usually placed in one of the large veins in the arm and threaded towards the heart to deliver intravenous (IV) medication or fluids directly to the bloodstream. A PICC can be left in place for weeks or months which means it can provide long-term access and fewer needles. For people with CF, PICC lines are used to deliver IV antibiotics to treat an infection.

How is a PICC line inserted?

The tube is threaded into a large vein above the right side of the heart using x-ray guidance. A chest x-ray or fluoroscopy is used to confirm it is correctly placed. In younger children the procedure is done under a general anaesthetic. Older children may have the procedure done under sedation while awake. Adults generally have the procedure done under local anaesthetic. The procedure may take up to an hour.

General care of a PICC line

You will receive information from the hospital about how to care for the PICC line. This might include taking care not to pull the PICC, avoiding certain sports or activities and having the line flushed regularly. Follow the guidance of your healthcare team.

Removal of a PICC line

A PICC can be removed without an anaesthetic. The stitches are removed, and the catheter slowly pulled out.



Risks associated with a PICC

Infection: The area must be kept clean and covered with a dry, waterproof dressing. This is important to prevent infection. Hands should be washed before handling the line. Common signs and symptoms of infection are pain, redness, warmth or discharge from the insertion site; shivers, chills, fever (with or without fatigue) and loss of appetite.

Blood clot: A PICC can rub against the vein wall and lead to development of a blood clot in the vein. Signs and symptoms of a clot are pain along the vein of insertion (neck, arm), swelling of the neck, face or arm, or change in skin colour and temperature.

Bleeding: If you experience bleeding at the catheter site, press firmly at the site as you would do after a blood test. The bleeding should stop after a few minutes. This is more common in people on blood thinners.

Redness along the arm: Sometimes the PICC line irritates the inside of the vein wall and results in swelling, redness and pain. This is the body's response to a foreign material. The symptoms should subside within a few days.

Catheter tip movement: Occasionally, excessive coughing, sneezing or hiccupping may trigger movement of the catheter tip within the body. Signs and symptoms may include pain in the shoulder, jaw, ear or neck.

Breakage or accidental removal: Excessive pulling or accidental severage (teeth/ scissors) can damage the PICC.

If any of the above occur, seek advice from your CF team or present to ED.

Useful resources

- [PICC](#) (PCH)
- [KKIND](#) (PCH)
- [Procedural anxiety factsheets](#) (CFWA)