

Infection Prevention and You



Caring for your PICC line at home

If you have just had a PICC line (Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter) put in your arm, there are some important things you need to know. This line is used for intravenous therapy such as medications, blood transfusions, extra fluids, or nutrition that you will need over an extended period of time.

The actual tube is about 24 inches long. It threads up your arm until it reaches the large vein above your heart. Your PICC may have one or two lines (also known as lumens); fluids will go into these lines.

The PICC line generally stays in for about a month, but can be left in longer if needed and if you don't get an infection. Regular checkups with your doctor are very important.

Your healthcare provider will give you specific instructions on how to care for your PICC line.

Here are some additional tips:

- Keep the dressing (or bandage) clean, dry, and secured to the skin. If it gets wet or torn, change it right away. Do not put lotions or ointments under the dressing.
 - When you're ready to change the dressing (or bandage) over your PICC line, make sure you do it in a clean, dry area away from drafts.
 - Changing the dressing is a "sterile" process. Your nurse will explain how to handle the supplies without contaminating them.
 - When showering, cover the dressing with a waterproof cover such as plastic wrap.
- Wash your hands with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer thoroughly before you handle the PICC line.
- Never use scissors on the line.
- Carry a smooth edge clamp with you in case the tubing breaks.
- You may need to flush the line with saline or heparin. Follow your doctor's order.
- Dispose of dirty supplies in a closed trash can.
- Never reuse needles, syringes, or other supplies.
- If supplies fall on the floor, throw them out.
- Keep the clamp(s) closed when not in use and when the cap is off.
- Keep the end caps covered with an alcohol cover provided by your physician.
- Unless otherwise instructed, you can resume your normal activities such as school, work, exercise (except swimming and contact sports), and sexual activity. Avoid strenuous work like lifting objects more than 10 pounds.
- Keep your pets away from your PICC lines.

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If you don't care for your PICC line properly, you could develop complications such as occlusions (blockage), phlebitis (inflammation of a vein), thrombosis (blood clots), hemorrhage (bleeding), and infection.

Call your healthcare provider or go the emergency department immediately, if:

- You develop a fever.
- You become short of breath or develop a cough.
- There is bloody drainage or other leakage from the insertion site.
- You develop pain or swelling in the arm, chest, or face.
- You develop redness, warmth, or a lump at the insertion site.
- There is a change in the length of the tube.
- You feel pain or discomfort receiving your medication through the line.

Additional Resources

[Central Venous Catheters: Topic Overview—WebMD](#)

[Clean your hands often—APIC](#)

[PICC line care at home—Children's Hospitals and Clinics of Minnesota](#)

[Caring for your PICC line—National Jewish Health](#)

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