

Patient information

PICC lines

What is a PICC line?

A PICC (peripherally inserted central catheter) line is a long thin flexible tube that is inserted into a vein in your upper arm. The line is pushed along the vein until its tip reaches one of the large veins just above your heart. A PICC line can stay in place for the duration of your treatment.

A PICC line may have one or two tubes (lumens) and these are used to deliver medication, nutrition and fluids directly into the blood stream. It can also be used for taking blood samples.

Why do you need a PICC line?

Lines are inserted for several reasons, these include:

- Small veins in your hands and arms which are difficult to access repeatedly.
- The need for certain treatments over a long period of time eg antibiotics, TPN (Total Parenteral Nutrition) and chemotherapy
- The need for medication that may cause discomfort if given through a cannula in your lower arm

How is the line put in?

Outpatients: If your PICC line is being placed as an outpatient you will be asked to attend the Venous Access Team (VAT). The room is known as the PICC room located on level one within discharge waiting area.

You may eat as normal and if possible, have plenty of water to drink prior to the procedure.

You may drive yourself although you may wish to have someone with you for company.

Please wear a sleeveless or loose fitting short sleeved top for the procedure.

Inpatients: If you are an inpatient and it is safe to do so, we will transfer you to the PICC room for the procedure.

If you are able to eat and drink, please continue and if possible have plenty of water to drink prior to the procedure.

A relative may accompany you for the procedure if you wish.

A specially trained nurse will insert your PICC line. The procedure will be explained to you and you will have an opportunity to ask questions. You will be asked to sign a consent form.

You will be made comfortable on a bed and if you are an inpatient you will possibly be transferred to the PICC room on your bed.

The procedure can take 30 to 60 minutes.

There will be two members of the venous access team present who will explain the procedure to you and answer any questions that you may have.

Local anaesthetic (lidocaine) is used to numb the area around the vein prior to the procedure in the upper arm.

The nurse putting in your PICC line will wear a surgical gown and you will be covered with a surgical drape. Please do not be alarmed this is to ensure that everything is kept clean throughout the procedure.

PICC lines are inserted using ultra sound to locate a vein which are 1 - 2cm deep in your arm.

We also use a device call 'Sherlock 3CG Recognition' (yes, it is genuinely called Sherlock). This is a 'Y' shaped box that sits on your chest during the procedure.

Connected to this are two leads with sticky pads which are placed approximately on your right shoulder and left hip. This enables the PICC line to be placed in the optimum position.

Please be aware that not all patients are suitable for 3CG recognition technology and for these patients the PICC line will be placed using ultra sound followed by a chest x-ray to confirm the position of the PICC line.

If you have a pacemaker the 3CG technology may not work therefore you will have a chest x-ray to confirm position of the PICC line.

Occasionally it may be difficult to insert the PICC line and the procedure can be unsuccessful. We may try the procedure in your other arm if necessary.

The following can be reasons why placement was unsuccessful:

- Previous injury or surgery to your shoulders
- Veins are too small
- Anatomy

Medications

You do not need to stop any medications for the PICC line placement so please take all your medications as prescribed at your usual times unless you are told otherwise by your medical team.

Risks and complications

As with most procedures, there is a small risk of complications, these include:

- **Infection:** It is possible for an infection to develop around the area where the PICC line goes into the vein. If this area becomes red, swollen, sore, oozes or if you develop a temperature above 37.5°C, have a shivering attack or feel generally unwell, you must let your nurse or doctor know.
If you are being treated as an outpatient you will need to contact the team looking after your care, for example Outpatient Parental Antibiotic Therapy (OPAT) or for oncology / haematology patients you are given a special red card with an out of hours number to contact. If you are unable to contact them you need to attend the Emergency Department at your nearest hospital. Please refer to the contact numbers at the end of this leaflet.
- **Thrombosis:** It is possible for a blood clot to develop in your vein anywhere along the length of the PICC. If you develop severe pain in your arm and it becomes red, swollen or hot, you must let someone know immediately. Contact numbers can be found at the end of this leaflet.
- **Phlebitis:** This is inflammation of the vein due to irritation from the line. You may feel discomfort around and above the insertion site for a few days. You may find it helpful to take regular pain relief such as paracetamol.
- **Dressings:** Occasionally you may develop an allergy to the dressing used to secure your line. If you have concerns for inpatients please inform your ward nurse who will contact VAT for an alternative dressing and for outpatients please contact your team for review. Contact details at the end of this leaflet.

- **Breaks, leaks and drips:** Very occasionally you may notice that the area around your PICC is wet. This can be a sign of a break in the line or a loose connection; we are often able to repair a line. If you are an inpatient please inform your nurse. If you are an outpatient please inform your team for review. Contact details at the end of this leaflet.
- **Misplacement:** Occasionally the line goes in with ease but the x-ray shows that it is not quite in the correct place. If this happens the line may need to be pulled back slightly or your line may need to be repositioned by a radiologist; this is called a linogram and takes place within the x-ray department. However due to the technology of 3CG recognition during placement this is very rare.

Securing device

During your procedure the team will inform you if a securing device called SecurAcath has been placed. This is an orange triangular shape device that is fitted as a subcutaneous anchor once the PICC line has been placed. This is to ensure the line does not move out of place. If you feel any scratching or discomfort from the SecurAcath please inform your care team so that they can review. The device can be removed if necessary.

Caring for your line

Following your PICC line insertion you will have a bandage placed over the area, your dressing will be changed the next day. If you are an inpatient this will be done by your ward nurse. If you are an outpatient this will be done by your care team and an appointment is typically made in advance before you attend for your PICC placement.

Following your initial dressing, your line will be re-dressed and checked weekly.

To prevent your line from blocking, it must be flushed before and after each use.

If your line is not in use it can remain in place but it must be flushed and dressed once a week. If you are an inpatient this will be done by your ward nurse.

If you are an outpatient this will be done by your care team, community nurse or your GP practice nurse. For oncology or haematology patients this can also be done on the Mobile Cancer Care Unit, speak to the Macmillan receptionist for more information on this.

If you experience any pain, discomfort or a shivering attack please inform your PICC line care provider or for out of hours please attend the Emergency Department at your nearest hospital.

Living with your line

You can lead a normal life with a PICC line but there are some things you need to be aware of:

Bathing: You may have a bath or shower as normal but you must keep your line dry. Please do not submerge your arm underwater when bathing. A waterproof cast cover (shower sleeve) can be purchased which will protect the area, these are available in the Friends of West Suffolk Hospital shop.

For oncology patients, you are eligible to receive a free shower sleeve. A request for a prescription slip will be given to you following PICC insertion, you will need take the slip to your GP practice for them to provide you with a prescription for one.

Sports: Sports such as tennis and golf are discouraged as the PICC line may become misplaced. You must not go swimming.

Working: There are no restrictions on working with a PICC line in place provided that your doctor is happy for you to do so. Please avoid heavy lifting or manual work.

Driving: There is no reason why you cannot drive provided you are medically fit to do so.

Holidays: It is possible to holiday with a PICC line. Please talk to your doctor especially if planning a trip abroad. If staying in the UK it may be possible for you to attend a local hospital for flushing and dressing however if your partner or carer does this for you then this can continue wherever your destination. If travelling by air, always carry your equipment in your hand luggage.

Pets and children: Do not let them play with your PICC line. Keep it covered at all times. Wash your hands thoroughly after handling pets to avoid any risk of infection.

PICC line removal

Once your treatment has finished and your doctors have agreed that the line can be removed, a nurse will do this either on the ward (if you are an inpatient) or you will be asked to attend SDEC (for OPAT Patients) or Macmillan Unit for Oncology / Haematology patients.

The line is gently pulled out using a sterile technique throughout and this is normally a painless procedure, if you have a securAcath in place this will also be removed following the removal of your line.

If your line has been removed due to a suspected infection in your line, the PICC tip will be sent to the laboratory for analysis.

A dry dressing will be applied which can be removed after 48 hours.

Remember

We are here to help. Any questions not covered within this leaflet please call the following:

Venous Access Team (VAT) on 01284 712990, between 8.00am and 4.00pm Monday to Friday.

MacMillan Day Unit on 01284 713040, between 8.00am and 6.00pm Monday to Friday.

OPAT on 01284712783, between 8.00am and 6.00pm Monday to Friday.

In the event you require assistance out of hours please call West Suffolk Hospital 01284 73000 and ask to speak to the Emergency Department or Ambulatory Care.

Oncology, Haematology patients please contact the Acute Oncology Service out of hours on 07495 440 616.

If you have any worries or questions after reading this leaflet, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the website for AccessAble (formerly DisabledGo)

<https://www.accessable.co.uk/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust>



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