

# VASCULAR ACCESS

Caring for your  
peripherally  
inserted central  
catheter (PICC)

PATIENT GUIDE



Value Life

# The peripherally inserted central catheter (PICC)

Our patient guide provides information about the care of your PICC and things to look out for. For any additional information you should contact your healthcare professional.

## What is a PICC?

A PICC is a long, thin, flexible tube. It is inserted into one of the large veins of the upper arm.

## Why do I need a PICC?

It has been recommended that you have a PICC inserted because you need intravenous (IV) therapy or access for an extended period of time. This PICC can be left in place for several weeks or months and means that you can finish your treatment without having to have repeated cannulations.

## How will it be inserted?

Your PICC will be put in by a specially trained nurse or doctor usually in the ward area, theatre room or radiology department. The person inserting your PICC will treat it as a clean procedure although it is not an operation. An ultrasound machine should be used to help find the most suitable vein. Local anaesthetic may be used prior to the insertion of your PICC which will be discussed with you. The PICC will be inserted using a needle and a short wire. Once the PICC is in position the needle and wire are removed. You may feel some minor discomfort while the PICC is being inserted. The PICC will be held in place by a securing device attached (like a plaster) to the skin and a see through dressing. It will take around 30 minutes for your PICC to be put in.

## Potential problems on inserting the PICC

Usually a PICC is inserted without any problems, however occasionally there are problems faced including:

- **Difficulty or inability to insert PICC**

It may be difficult to insert the PICC if you have narrow veins. This might make the procedure slightly longer and the person inserting the PICC may have to try another vein or refer you to another healthcare professional for assistance or for an alternative device

- **Minor bleeding / bruising**

You might experience minor bleeding or some bruising around the insertion site. This should stop after a few hours, but if you have a blood clotting disorder or are on medications that thin the blood, it might last longer.

## What are the alternatives?

Your healthcare professional will discuss other alternatives where appropriate.

## Caring for your PICC

- You can change the dressing yourself if you have been shown how, otherwise you should contact your healthcare professional or return to the hospital for the dressing to be changed
- When dressing, flushing or using the PICC, hands must be washed and gloves should be worn
- The dressings and needle-free device 'access port' are usually changed on a weekly basis, unless they are loose or soiled then they should be changed immediately.

## Living with your PICC

- You can shower with a special protective waterproof sleeve covering the PICC. Alternatively, clean cling film can be used to cover your PICC
- If you have a bath, make sure your PICC is not placed in the bathwater
- You can move your arm normally after the PICC is inserted, but avoid doing any strenuous work
- There is no reason not to sleep on the same side of your PICC. Some people prefer to wear a long sleeved top while sleeping
- Swimming is not advised
- Avoid using a sauna or any other activity where the dressing is likely to become loose
- Do not carry heavy bags on the same side as your PICC
- When you no longer need the PICC it will be taken out.

## Exercise

- Regular exercise is important for healthy blood flow
- Do not favour your arm and use it normally 24 hours after your PICC is inserted
- Repetitive arm movements that may involve sweating are generally discouraged as this may cause the dressing to loosen with a possibility that the PICC may move in the vein or possibly accidentally fall out.



# Are there any risks once it is in place?

Many patients complete their treatment without having any problems with their PICC but there are certain risks involved and it is important that you are aware of these, what to look for and what to do if they occur. The person inserting your PICC will spend time discussing this with you but please read the information contained within this booklet as well.

## Vein irritation

Because the PICC sits inside the vein this can cause minor irritation, especially in the first five days. This can happen if the PICC is not secured appropriately.

**What should I look out for?** The area of the insertion might be a little red for the first few days after the PICC is placed.

**What should I do?** If the vein with the PICC in it becomes red or painful, please inform your healthcare professional immediately. Warm packs can be used to help with the irritation.

## Infection

Very occasionally infection can occur when you have a PICC inserted. This may result in additional medical treatment and possible removal of the PICC. A clean or sterile procedure should be used by anyone using or caring for your PICC.

### This includes:

- Hand washing
- Wearing gloves
- Using antiseptic swabs to clean the needle-free device for 15 – 30 seconds and allow to dry for 30 seconds before use.

### What should I look out for?

- The PICC insertion site becoming red and swollen
- The site being hot to touch and tender
- A temperature, fever, chills or generally feeling unwell.

**What should I do?** Contact your healthcare professional immediately.

## Blood clot

On rare occasions it is possible for a blood clot (thrombosis) to develop in your vein. Although this might sound alarming, if it occurs it is not likely to cause a serious problem. This would normally result in additional medical treatment.

**What should I look out for?** Your arm with the PICC in may become painful or swollen, you may also notice some discolouration.

**What should I do?** Please inform your healthcare professional immediately.

## PICC movement

**What should I look out for?** The length of the visible section of your catheter will be longer.

**What should I do?** Secure the PICC in place and inform your nurse. Do not use the PICC until it has been checked.

## What if my PICC falls out?

Inform your healthcare professional immediately. Press firmly on the hole in your skin for a few minutes then apply a small sterile dressing. If it continues to bleed reapply pressure until it stops. Keep the PICC for the nurse to inspect.

## PICC breakage

**What should I look out for?** Leakage from the PICC.

**What should I do?** If the PICC breaks or you accidentally cut the PICC, clamp the PICC above the cut and please contact your healthcare professional. Stop any infusions that are running.

## PICC blocked

Sometimes your PICC may block. It may be possible to unblock your PICC but if this is not possible it will need to be removed. To help prevent blocking, your PICC must be flushed on a regular basis and after medication has been given.

**What should I look out for?** Infusions will not run and your PICC will not be able to be flushed.

**What should I do?** Contact your healthcare professional.

# Handwashing technique

A nine step handwashing technique was devised by Ayliffe et al (1978), and it is used regularly by healthcare professionals. Using it yourself may improve the care of your PICC. The technique uses soap or an antiseptic solution and running water, and each step consists of five strokes forward and five backward.



•..... **Step one**

Wet hands thoroughly before applying washing agent.



**Step two** .....

Rub palm to palm.



•..... **Step three**

Right palm over back of left hand and left palm over back of right hand.



**Step four** .....

Palm to palm with fingers interlaced.

**Step five** .....

Backs of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked.



..... **Step six**

Wash each thumb by clasping and rotating in the palm of the opposite hand.



**Step seven** .....

Rotational rubbing back and forwards with clasped fingers of right hand in left palm and vice versa.



..... **Step eight**

Rinse hands under running water.



**Step nine** .....

Dry hands thoroughly.



# Important information

## Your PICC information

Code number: \_\_\_\_\_

Length: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of insertion: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

In case of queries please contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

## Special instructions

1. Dressing and securement device should be changed every seven days (unless it becomes wet or falls off)
2. The needle-free device 'bung' should be changed every seven days
3. Your PICC should be flushed on a weekly basis when not in use and following every drug administration or blood sampling.
4. Ensure hands are washed and gloves are worn when the PICC is accessed
5. Your own instructions:

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### For further information, please contact: [info-uk@vygon.com](mailto:info-uk@vygon.com)

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