

# Your PICC line

## Cancer Services

Information for patients

Produced: Jan 2025

Review: Jan 2028

Leaflet number: 587 Version: 7

### What is a PICC line?

PICC stands for Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter.

A PICC line is a fine tube that is inserted into a large vein in your upper arm. The tube is then threaded into one of the larger veins that leads to your heart (see diagram opposite).

A specially trained nurse will insert your PICC line.

### Why do I need a PICC line?

You may need a PICC line because:

- Your chemotherapy regimen requires you to have one of the chemotherapy drugs given as a continuous infusion and having a PICC line means you can have that part of your treatment at home.
- You have veins that are difficult to find and insert needles into.
- You have a needle phobia.

As long as there are no complications your PICC line will stay in your arm until your course of treatment has finished.

### What happens before my PICC line is inserted?

A doctor or nurse will have assessed your veins to see if they are suitable to have a PICC line inserted. You will be given an appointment to come to the Radiology Department for pre procedure checks. When you attend the Radiology Department, you will be taken to the Vascular Access Service where you will meet the team member who will be inserting your PICC line.

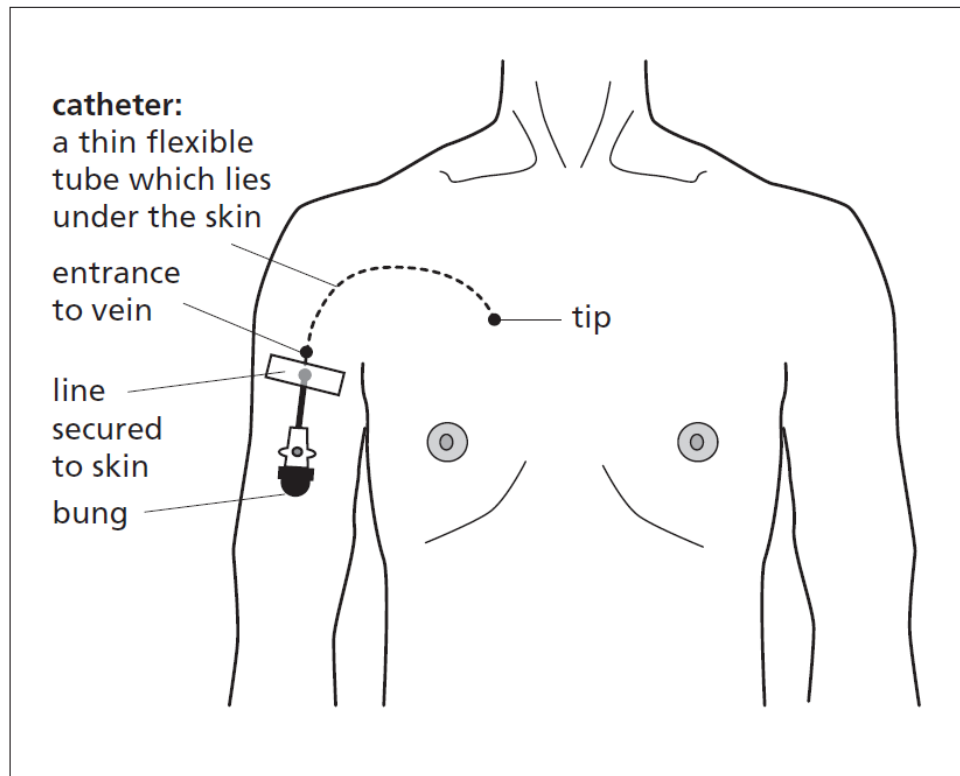
You will remain in the Vascular Access department after you have had your PICC line put in, to make sure you are well. You will be at the hospital for up to half a day.

**Health information and support is available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit [www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk](http://www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk) for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals  
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact [InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk](mailto:InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk)

## How is a PICC line inserted?

To have the PICC line inserted you will be asked to lie on a bed with your arm resting on a table. You will be given a local anaesthetic to numb the skin before the needle is inserted. It takes about 15 to 20 minutes to insert the line and apply the dressing.



## What are the possible complications?

Complications with PICC lines are rare, but it is important that you are aware of these. The nurse will discuss these complications with you before the line is put in and will be able to answer any questions you may have.

Below is a list of some of the possible complications. **If any of these occur, or you are worried about something to do with your PICC line, please contact the hospital immediately on the emergency number below.**

- **Mechanical phlebitis:** once the PICC line has been inserted into the vein it can sometimes irritate the wall of the vein. This can cause soreness and redness in the arm where the line has been put in. To prevent this apply heat (using a heat pad or hot water bottle wrapped in a towel) to the arm where the line has been put in. This may need to be done two or three times a day for 20 minutes at a time for the first week after the line has been put in.

If you have any pain in your arm, or if your arm looks red and feels hot, you must contact the hospital for advice.

## What are the possible complications? (continued)

- **Infection:** there is a slight risk that you will get an infection in the line. The risk is slight because the line is put in under sterile conditions and a sterile dressing always covers the insertion site.

If you notice any leaking of pus or clear fluid from the insertion site, have a temperature above 37.5 degrees Centigrade or feel shivery you must contact the hospital for advice.

- **Blood clot (thrombosis):** there is a risk of developing a blood clot in the vein where the line has been inserted.

If this occurs you may notice that your hand or arm swells up. If this happens you must contact the hospital and arrangements will be made for you to see the hospital doctor. You will need to have a scan of your arm to see if there is a blood clot.

If a blood clot is found you will be given daily injections to dissolve the clot and the line will be removed. It is advisable to do some light arm exercises and continue to use the arm as usual.

- **Air in the PICC line:** it is important not to let air get into the PICC line. You can prevent this happening by making sure that the bung is always in place at the end of the line. If your PICC line has a clamp this must always be shut when the line is not in use.

If you think that air may have got into your line please contact the hospital.

- **Your PICC line moves or comes out:** the dressing holds the line in place and should prevent the line from coming out. The line will be measured to check that it has not moved. This will usually be done when the dressing is changed, before treatment is given.

If the length of PICC line you can see appears to be longer than usual, please tell the chemotherapy or district nurse before they dress your PICC or give your chemotherapy.

- **Damage to the line:** the PICC line is a very thin tube and if it becomes twisted it can become damaged.
- It is important that you keep any sharp objects such as scissors away from the PICC line as this can cause damage to the PICC line.

If there is any leakage of fluid from the line when you are having your chemotherapy or when the line is being flushed, please contact the hospital as soon as possible. If the line is damaged it may need to be removed and you may need to have a new line put in.

## Dressing your PICC line

The PICC is secured to your arm with a special dressing and then covered with a tubi-grip sleeve. To prevent infection this dressing needs to be changed once a week. This will be done by your district nurse.

It is important that you do not get the dressing wet. If you usually have a shower, you will need to cover your arm with a waterproof sleeve. The nurse will give you information about how to get a waterproof sleeve. You will not be able to go swimming while you have a PICC line in.

## Flushing your PICC line

Your PICC line will need to be flushed with 'normal saline' (sterile salt water). This is to keep it open and free of clots. The district nurse will do this when the dressing is changed.

You will be given all the equipment required to flush and redress the line for the first week. You should take this home for the district nurse to use. The district nurse will then order further supplies.

Arrangements will be made for your line to be flushed and redressed on a weekly basis.

## Contact numbers

If you have any problems with your PICC line, or you have any concerns or questions, please telephone us on the most appropriate number from below:

**Emergency Helpline (24 hours a day, 7 days a week):** 0808 178 2212

### Chemotherapy Suite:

General enquiries 0116 258 6107

8.30am - 6.00pm Monday to Friday (except bank holidays)

**Osborne Treatment Centre:** 0116 258 5263

(Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm)

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Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

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