

I N T R A V E N O U S C A T H E T E R

PATIENT INFORMATION SHEET

What is an intravenous catheter?

Certain treatments require direct access into a vein. In these situations, a skilled healthcare professional inserts a needle and threads a small, thin catheter into a vein. This catheter is called an intravenous or “IV”.

What is the purpose of an intravenous catheter?

An IV may be inserted for several reasons. These include the following:

1. To administer fluid or nutrients into the body that cannot be given orally.
2. To give medicines that cannot be given orally.
3. To give blood or blood products
4. To give sedative or pain medications that will increase your comfort level during outpatient or inpatient procedures.

How is an IV catheter inserted?

An IV catheter is usually put in the hand or forearm. *Sometimes more than one IV catheter may be needed.* The IV catheter is inserted as follows:

1. You will be asked to sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Your arms will be examined to determine which vein will be used for the IV catheter.
2. The site to be used will be cleansed with an antibacterial solution and allowed to dry.
3. A tourniquet, which is a rubberband-like material, will be placed on the arm. The tourniquet tightly squeezes the arm and fills the vein with blood. This remains in place until the needle is determined to be in place.
4. *The insertion of the IV may be slightly uncomfortable but the discomfort does not last.*
5. Bruising may occur with this procedure.

How is an IV catheter inserted? (Continued)

6. Once the IV catheter is in place, the tourniquet will be released and the needle will be removed. The clear plastic catheter that remains in the vein will be secured in place with a clear dressing and tape.
7. A short tube with a cap extends from the IV catheter. The nursing staff will flush the catheter periodically to ensure fluids can be delivered freely.
8. Occasionally you will see small air bubbles in the short tubing. They will be absorbed by your body without causing any harmful effects.
9. Occasionally you may see blood in the short tubing. This will not cause any harmful effects.

What is an IV pump?

Your tubing may be put through a machine called a pump. The pump controls how fast the fluid flows into the vein. The pump has an alarm that makes a beeping sound when it is set off. The alarm alerts the nurse to check the IV.

What do I need to monitor?

Your nurse will regularly check your IV to be sure it is functioning properly. Generally an IV catheter is comfortable and trouble-free after insertion. *Ask your nurse to check the IV and the IV site if you notice any of the following signs:*

- Pain
- Redness
- Swelling
- Leaking Fluid
- Bleeding
- Loose Tape
- Blood backing up in the IV tubing

For more Patient Education Fact Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web site at www.greenhosp.org and click on Patients & Visitors, then Patient Education