

What is a PICC?

PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

What is a PICC?

PICC is an abbreviation for “Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter”. A PICC is a long, flexible tube that is put into a vein in your arm and threaded up into a large vein just above your heart (the Superior Vena Cava). Some PICCs have one line or “lumen” and others have two, like a tunnel with two lanes. There are also PICCs that are specially made to withstand extra pressure needed during certain diagnostic tests. PICCs come in different sizes or gauges. The type and gauge of your PICC will depend on what your doctor has ordered.

Why do I need to have a PICC?

You may need a PICC if you:

- Have small veins that are difficult to find access
- Are very anxious about needles
- Need treatments such as chemotherapy or antibiotics that are irritating to your veins.

A PICC allows you to receive repeated or continuous treatments without having difficulty finding a vein for them. Examples of fluids that may be given through the PICC include (but are not limited to) hydration therapy, antibiotics, chemotherapy, analgesics, nutritional therapy and blood/blood products. Because your PICC is in a large vein, the blood flow safely dilutes the infusing fluids into your bloodstream. Blood for laboratory tests can be withdrawn from your PICC if it is a 4 French or greater gauge.

Who will insert my PICC?

An Interventional Radiologist in the Diagnostic Imaging Department will insert your PICC. Prior to inserting the PICC you will be given an explanation of the procedure and you will be asked to sign an informed consent. It is important to inform the radiologist if you have a history of any abnormal bleeding or if you are taking medications that may affect the clotting of your blood.

How is the PICC inserted?

- Before inserting the PICC, the radiologist will measure the distance from your upper arm to your chest to determine the length of the catheter needed. Ultrasound is used to locate a large vein in your upper arm.
- Your arm will be cleansed with an anti-bacterial soap and covered with a sterile cloth to prevent infection.
- Lidocaine, a numbing medication or anesthetic, will be used to numb the area above the selected vein. If you are allergic to Lidocaine or other anesthetics, it is important to let the nurse or radiologist know this before the procedure.
- A needle is used to enter your vein. With ultrasound guidance the PICC is inserted and the tip placement is determined by fluoroscopy.
- The needle is removed and a securement device is placed to keep the PICC in place.
- The insertion site is covered with a sterile pressure dressing.

Are there specific precautions after the PICC is inserted?

- You may feel some mild discomfort in your arm near the insertion site after the procedure. This discomfort will usually go away within 24 to 36 hours. It is important to rest your arm.
- A small amount of blood leaking from the PICC insertion site is common during the first 24 hours. Bruising may occur.
- No swimming, hot tubs, or baths allowed. Cover the PICC dressing with clear plastic wrap and tape to keep dry while washing.
- Avoid vigorous, repetitive arm movement or forceful coughing. Avoid weight lifting.

Who will help me care for my PICC?

Your doctor will write the orders for your follow-up care. You may have a home infusion company, or you may be going to your doctor's office for treatments, or you may be coming to Greenwich Hospital's ambulatory IV program (IDAP).

If there are complications with my PICC, what do I do?

Call your doctor or IV nurse immediately if you experience any of the following symptoms after your PICC insertion:

- Your PICC becomes damaged (immediately use the blue plastic padded clamp that you were given to clamp the PICC above the damaged area).
- Excessive bright red bleeding (dressing is soaked with blood).
- Fever and/or chills
- Pain, warmth, redness, or swelling in your arm, shoulder, or up the side of your neck on the side where your PICC is inserted.
- Change in the length of the section of PICC exposed.
- Any leakage of IV fluid from the PICC or the PICC insertion site.
- Inability to flush the PICC (Fluids should not be forced into your PICC).

What are the general guidelines for PICC care?

- Wash your hands prior to handling your PICC.
- Sterile technique is to be used when your PICC is cared for or accessed.
- Your PICC is only to be used for prescribed treatment.
- Dressing changes are in accordance with each institution protocol. At Greenwich Hospital, PICC dressings are changed twice a week if there is gauze under the clear dressing, and once a week if no gauze is used. Any time your dressing is wet, soiled or not intact it needs to be changed.
- Each lumen of your PICC should have a cap.
- Cap changes are also in accordance with the institution protocol. At Greenwich Hospital, caps are changed at least once a week.
- PICC flushes are in accordance with institution protocol. At Greenwich Hospital, if your PICC does not have a continuous infusion, it will be flushed daily, and before and after every use.
- Avoid blood pressures and venipunctures in the arm with the PICC.
- Keep scissors, razors and other sharp objects away from your PICC to prevent damage.
- You will be given a booklet from the manufacturer explaining all care and precautions for your particular PICC. Keep this booklet and share it with your caregivers.

Source: Greenwich Hospital Patient Care Services Policies and Procedures.

Est. 10/05, Rev 2/10

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