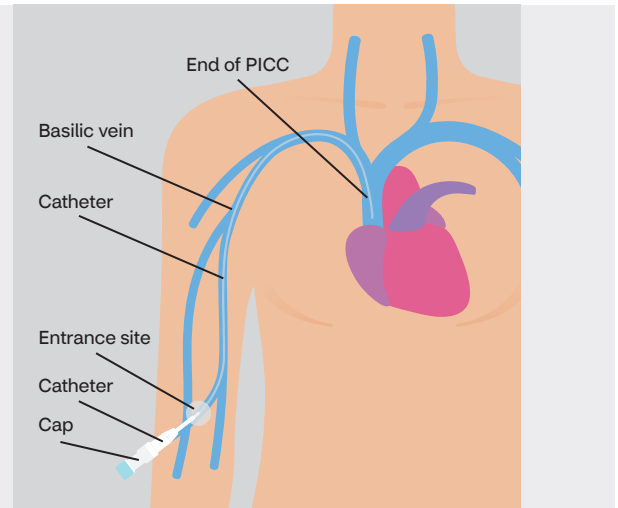


# Caring for Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter

A peripherally inserted central catheter (PICC) is a catheter that is made of soft, flexible material. It's inserted into a vein in your arm. A PICC allows you to receive medications that could cause damage if given through one of the smaller veins in your arms. A PICC may also be placed when you need to receive therapy through your vein for a long period of time.



## How is the PICC placed?

A doctor or a specially trained nurse will place the PICC into your arm. This will occur in the hospital, in a clinic, your doctor's office, or in your home. Using a needle and a guide wire, the nurse or doctor inserts the PICC into a vein in your arm. It's often placed just above or below the inner bend of your elbow. From there, the line is guided into a larger vein near your heart, called the superior vena cava.

Once the catheter is where it should be, the guide wire is removed and the PICC is left in place. This is a short procedure that lasts about 30 minutes to 1.5 hours. You may feel little or no discomfort. You'll also likely have no pain after the PICC is inserted.

The catheter site is the part of your skin where your catheter is placed. Secure this site with tape or sutures. You should also cover the site with a sterile dressing to protect it. Depending on how your PICC was inserted, you may need an x-ray. This helps make sure the catheter is in the right place near your heart. This means you may need to go to a place that has an x-ray machine.

## How long can my PICC stay in place?

Your PICC can remain in place for several months. In some cases, PICC lines can stay in longer. Your nurse will teach you about:

- Signs and symptoms of a catheter infection
- How to prevent PICC problems
- When to call your nurse or doctor

## How do I care for my PICC?

The PICC dressing change is a sterile procedure. Your nurse will change the PICC dressing at least weekly and will watch for any problems at the site. In some cases, the nurses may teach you or your caregiver how to change this dressing. The injection cap(s) at the end of your catheter will be changed at least weekly.

This may be done more often depending on your medication and whether your PICC is being used to obtain blood for lab tests. You and your caregiver will also learn how to flush your PICC after each use and as instructed when it's not being used. This helps keep your PICC line open so you can continue to receive the medication you need.

## What precautions should I take with my PICC?

You'll need to check your catheter exit site every day. You'll look for signs of infection or vein irritation such as redness, swelling or pain. **NEVER** use scissors to remove tape or dressing from around your site. Always secure your PICC where your site is. This helps prevent the tubing from snagging on objects and possibly tearing or pulling out.

### Bathing

For the first 24 hours after your PICC is inserted, do not bathe, shower or get the site wet. Always keep your catheter site dry. You may bathe or shower after the first 24 hours, as long as the site is protected with a water-resistant covering. Never submerge your site in water. Keeping your PICC dressing clean and dry helps prevent infections. If the PICC dressing gets wet, call your nurse for help with a dressing change. If you have been taught how to change your PICC dressing, change it right away after it gets wet. Make sure you notify Coram if you use an extra dressing kit. We'll replace the one you used. If you need suggestions for PICC supplies, contact your Coram team.

### Using plastic wrap to keep the PICC dry

- Cover the PICC dressing with a sock or other absorbent material.
- Wrap the arm with a plastic wrap (preferably a self-sealing one). Cover the entire PICC dressing and line.
- Make sure water does not run down the arm beneath the plastic wrap while you bathe or shower.
- Remove the plastic wrap and absorbent material right after showering. Check that the PICC dressing is dry.

## What problems can I have with my PICC?

You likely won't have any problems with your PICC while at home. But if you do, most issues can be resolved safely and easily at home. Below are some common problems and tips to help you manage them.

How to Manage Problems with Your PICC		
Problem	Signs to Watch For	Actions to Take
<b>Air embolism (air in PICC)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trouble breathing all of a sudden</li> <li>• Cough or pain in your chest, neck or shoulder that doesn't go away</li> <li>• Feeling dizzy or confused</li> </ul>	<p><b>THIS IS AN EMERGENCY – CALL 911</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clamp the catheter right away near where it enters your arm</li> <li>• If possible, lie down with your head lower than your hips and feet, and remain calm and quiet</li> <li>• Avoid air in the PICC:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Secure the injection cap on your catheter</li> <li>- Never remove the cap unless your catheter is clamped</li> <li>- Never use force to flush the catheter</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## How to Manage Problems with Your PICC

Problem	Signs to Watch For	Actions to Take
<b>Infection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fever (100.4 degrees or higher), with or without chills</li> <li>• Pain, warmth, swelling, drainage with or without an odor at the site</li> <li>• General muscle aches and soreness</li> <li>• Decrease in your activity level due to fatigue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call your doctor or nurse right away</li> <li>• Avoid infections by:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Taking steps to avoid contaminating the catheter and the supplies you use</li> <li>- <b>Washing your hands</b> before beginning any procedure</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Migration (movement) of the catheter out of the vein</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New sensation in your neck or chest when flushing your catheter</li> <li>• “Hearing” a flushing sound when flushing the catheter</li> <li>• A change in the length of your catheter from where it enters your body (looks longer or shorter)</li> <li>• Swelling of the face, neck, chest or arm; new or bulging chest veins</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call your doctor or nurse right away</li> <li>• <b>NEVER</b> push the catheter back into your vein; the catheter may need to be repositioned and x-rayed again or replaced</li> <li>• Apply pressure to the exit site using a gauze dressing if the catheter falls out completely</li> </ul>
<b>Break in catheter, accidental cut</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fluid or blood leaking from the catheter site</li> <li>• Visible cut or tear in the catheter material</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call your nurse right away; your catheter will need to be repaired or replaced</li> <li>• Avoid a break in the catheter by:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Never using scissors near your PICC</li> <li>- Never using force to flush your PICC</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Clamp catheter between where the PICC line enters your arm, and where the cut or tear is located</li> </ul>
<b>Phlebitis (swelling of the vein)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Redness, warmth and tenderness along the vein above the insertion site</li> <li>• Occurs usually within 3-5 days after the PICC was inserted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call your nurse right away</li> <li>• Elevate your arm on pillows</li> <li>• Apply warm moist compress, only if instructed by your nurse</li> </ul>

## How to Manage Problems with Your PICC

Problem	Signs to Watch For	Actions to Take
<p><b>Occluded (blocked) catheter</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Having trouble flushing your catheter with saline or heparin using normal pressure</li> </ul>	<p>To avoid an occluded catheter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flush your PICC regularly as you have been instructed</li> <li>Make sure that all clamps are open and there are no kinks in the catheter when you try to flush</li> <li><b>DO NOT</b> use extra pressure when flushing your catheter</li> <li>Flush your PICC anytime you see blood backing up, as instructed by your infusion nurse</li> <li>Call your nurse to report any trouble with flushing your catheter</li> </ul>
<p><b>Loose or disconnected cap</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A cap that fits loosely or comes off the catheter; air or bacteria can enter the catheter (see “Infection” and “Air embolism” sections)</li> <li>Fluid or blood that leaks out near the cap</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Securely tighten the cap; be careful not to over-tighten, which may crack the cap</li> <li>If your end cap becomes disconnected:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Make sure the catheter is clamped</li> <li>- Clean the end of the catheter with an alcohol pad for 15 seconds and replace with a new sterile cap, as instructed by your nurse</li> <li>- Discard the old cap. Do not re-use</li> <li>- Report any problems or disconnections with your end cap to your nurse right away</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Please refer to your **SASH Teaching Mat** for more information on how to avoid catheter complications.

## What can I expect when my PICC is removed?

Your nurse will tell you when the doctor has requested to remove the PICC. The PICC may be removed at your doctor's office, in the ambulatory infusion suite or at your home.

The dressing will be removed, and the catheter will be gently and slowly pulled out. Most patients feel little or no discomfort or pressure when their PICC is removed. After your PICC has been removed, your nurse will place a gauze over the exit site. You may remove this dressing after 24 hours.

### To help your site heal:

- Avoid heavy lifting or vigorous activities for 24 hours
- Keep the exit site dry for 24 hours

## Will I experience any symptoms after my PICC is removed?

Call your doctor after your PICC has been removed if you experience any of the following:

- Fever of 100.4°F or greater
- Chills
- Drainage from the exit site
- Redness, warmth, swelling or a pink to red streak going up your arm
- A "knot" at the exit site or anywhere in the arm

---

SASH (S: Saline; A: Administration of Medication; S: Saline; H: Heparin).

This information is not a substitute for medical advice or treatment. Talk to your doctor or health care provider about this information and any health related questions you have. Coram assumes no liability whatsoever for the information provided or for any diagnosis or treatment made as a result of this information.

Your privacy is important to us. Our employees are trained regarding the appropriate way to handle your private health information.

©2021 Coram, LLC. All rights reserved. 75-54785B 051821