



Patient & Family Guide

2024

PICC Line

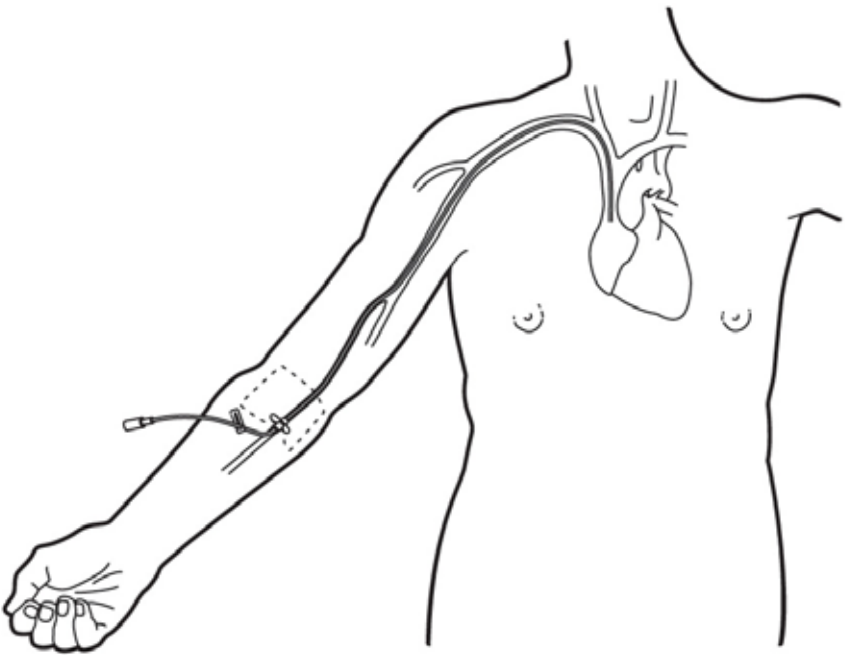


www.nshealth.ca

PICC Line

What is a PICC (peripherally inserted central catheter) line?

- A PICC line is a long intravenous (I.V.) catheter (tube). It is put into a vein in your arm and threaded into a vein above your heart.



Why do I need a PICC line?

- You may need a PICC line for long-term I.V. therapy of fluids and medication.

What are the benefits of having a PICC line?

- A PICC line:
 - › can lower the number of needle punctures.
 - › can be used for a long time.
 - › can be used for I.V. therapy at home.
 - › can be less irritating for your vein.
 - › is easy to remove when it is not needed.

Where do I go to get my PICC line inserted (put in)?

- A doctor or a specially trained nurse will insert your PICC line in your hospital room or in the Radiology (X-ray) Department.

How will my PICC line be put in?

- A member of your health care team will clean your arm. You will be covered with sterile (germ-free) cloths to keep the area clean.
- Next, a needle with local anesthetic (freezing) will be used to numb the area where the PICC line will enter your arm. This may sting.
- The anesthetic will numb the area so you will not feel any pain when the PICC line is inserted. You may feel a bit of pressure or pushing.

- The PICC line will be held in place with a device to keep it stable. The insertion site (where the PICC line enters your arm) will be covered with a dressing to keep it clean. This will lower the risk of infection.
- This usually takes about 1 hour.

What are the risks during insertion?

- There is a small chance of bruising at the insertion site.
- There may be a change in your heart rhythm for a few seconds.
- We may not be able to thread the catheter into your vein. If this happens, we will use a vein in your other arm.
- Your health care provider will talk about these risks with you.

What will happen after my PICC line is inserted?

- You may have a bit of bleeding around the insertion site.
- You may feel sore and have some redness around the insertion site. This is common. It will usually go away in 24 to 48 hours (1 to 2 days). **Tell your primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) if the redness does not go away or gets worse.**
- You may have some swelling at the insertion site. To help lower the swelling:
 - › Rest your arm on pillows above the level of your heart when you are sitting or lying down.

What are the risks of having a PICC line?

- There is a chance of infection.
- I.V. fluid from the PICC line may leak into your skin. If this happens, the fluid will be absorbed by your body.
- The PICC line may become blocked. If this happens, you may need medication, or your PICC line may need to be replaced.

- The PICC line may break. This is rare. If this happens, go to the nearest Emergency Department right away.
- Your health care provider will talk about these risks with you.

Caring for your PICC line

- In the hospital, your nurse will care for your PICC line.
- At home, a community nurse (like VON) will visit to care for your PICC line.
- The dressing may be changed the day after your PICC line is put in. Then, the dressing will be changed once a week.
- The dressing will also need to be changed any time it gets loose, dirty, or wet.
- The cap on the end of your PICC line will be changed once a week.
- **When your PICC line is not being used, it must be flushed once a week to keep it from getting blocked.**
 - › When your PICC line is being used for I.V. therapy, it must be flushed more often. Your health care provider will talk with you about how often it needs to be flushed.

How do I care for my PICC line at home?

- Every day, you should check:
 - › the cap to make sure it is tight.
 - › the dressing to make sure it is secure on your skin, and not getting loose.
 - › for signs of infection (like redness, pain, swelling, tenderness, or yellow or green-coloured drainage) at the insertion site).
 - › your arm and neck on the side of the PICC line for swelling and pain.

Remember:

- **Always wash or sanitize your hands well before and after touching your supplies or your PICC line.**
- Keep the area around your PICC line clean and dry.
- Keep supplies for your PICC line in a clean, dry place. **The supplies should only be opened by a nurse.**

To keep your PICC line from getting caught on your clothes, wear long sleeves or gauze netting where the PICC line goes into your arm.

- If you need help walking, use a walker instead of crutches.
- **Do not** use safety pins or scissors near your PICC line.

Always carry your PICC line wallet card with you. You will get this card after your PICC line is put in.

What activities can I do with a PICC line?

- Most daily activities are OK.
- You can bend your arm and reach as usual.
 - › Avoid heavy lifting and contact sports (like basketball, football, hockey).
- You can have a bath or a shower.
 - › **Do not get your PICC line wet.** A wet dressing or catheter may put you at risk for infection. If you have a bath, **do not put your arm under the water.**
 - › **Wrap your PICC line and dressing with plastic wrap or a plastic bag before getting in the tub or shower.** Tape the plastic on all sides to keep the PICC line from getting wet. **When you are done, take the plastic off right away.**
- **Do not** swim or go in a hot tub with your PICC line.
- If you are not sure if an activity is OK, ask your primary health care provider.

Call your primary health care provider right away if you have any of these symptoms. If you cannot reach them, call 911 or go to the nearest Emergency Department right away:

- The insertion site is red, warm, painful, swollen, or draining fluid.
- There is blood on your dressing.
- You have blisters near the insertion site.
- You feel pain or discomfort when I.V. fluids are put into your PICC line.
- You feel tired or weak for more than 24 hours (1 day).
- You have a fever (temperature above 38 °C or 100.4 °F).
- You have chills.
- You vomit (throw up).
- Your PICC line is getting longer. **Do not use your PICC line if this happens. Leave it in place and tape it to your skin.** It will need to be replaced.
- **If your PICC line falls out:**
 - › **Put pressure on the insertion site with a clean gauze or a towel. Go to the nearest Emergency Department right away.**

Call 911 if you have:

- › Pain or swelling in your arm, neck, shoulder, or chest on the side of the PICC line
- › Trouble breathing
- › Chest pain that is getting worse

What should I do if my PICC line breaks or gets damaged?

1. Bend the PICC line back on itself between the break and where it enters your skin.
 - › If there is not enough of the PICC line to bend it back on itself, **gently** pull 2 ½ to 5 cm (1 to 2 inches) out from where it enters your skin, then bend it back on itself.
2. Secure the PICC line to your arm with tape or a rubber band.
3. **Go to the nearest Emergency Department right away.**

How will my PICC line be removed?

- Your PICC line will be removed:
 - › if there is a problem with it.

OR

 - › when you no longer need it.
- Your PICC line will be removed at your hospital bedside or at a clinic by a nurse or a doctor. This will not hurt.
- They will place a dressing over the site where the PICC line was removed. Leave the dressing in place for 24 hours, then remove it gently.
- Keep the site clean and dry as it heals.

What are your questions?

Please ask a member of your health care team. We are here to help you.

Notes:

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here:
<https://library.nshealth.ca/Patients-Guides>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Prepared by: CVAD Practice Committee
Illustration: Used with permission from Hamilton Health Sciences
Designed by: Nova Scotia Health Library Services

QV85-1571 © June 2024 Nova Scotia Health Authority
To be reviewed June 2027 or sooner, if needed.