

Your Care at Home: PICC Line

*****Your Care at Home: PICC Line*****

Narrator

If you're leaving the hospital with a PICC line, or peripherally inserted central catheter, chances are it's because you need long-term medicines, fluids, nutrition or, oftentimes, chemotherapy which are specifically made to be given into a vein.

You may need this catheter for weeks or even months, and changing the dressing around it is a sterile procedure that will likely be done by a home health nurse every 2-3 days. In the next few minutes, we're going to show you some best practices for caring for your PICC line. Now, as with any medical procedure, your healthcare provider may have specific instructions that he or she may want you to follow. Be sure to listen to their advice.

Before leaving the hospital, ask a lot of questions so you know exactly what to expect with your PICC line at home, what you can or cannot do, and the role of your home health nurse. A PICC is a long, thin tube that is threaded through a vein in your arm to a larger vein closer to your heart.

Complications from a PICC line are rare, but they can be very serious. They include:

- Bloodstream infection
- Bleeding
- Abnormal heart beat
- Nerve injury, or
- A blockage in the vein such as a blood clot or air bubble

Because of the risk of infection or other complications, it's critical that the care of a PICC line, including dressing changes, is done under sterile conditions. That's why a home health nurse or other trained caregiver handle this task for you when you are home. No one else should touch your catheter.

Before touching your catheter, your nurse or caregiver thoroughly washes and dries their hands with antiseptic-containing soap or a hand sanitizer. Then they open the sterile dressing change kit provided with your PICC line and put on a mask before exposing the catheter site. Using clean gloves and alcohol pads they will remove the old dressing and dispose of them in accordance with local regulations. Then, wearing a new pair of sterile gloves, they will cleanse the area and then apply a new dressing. If you or your family have any questions about dressing changes, don't be afraid to ask. Advocate for yourself.

Your healthcare agency may have a specific protocol for dressing changes and your caregiver should be happy to discuss this with you. Your health and safety is of utmost importance. Your home health professional will inspect your insertion site to look for any signs of infection, but you should be aware of these, too. Redness, swelling, pain or leakage. A fever, chills, or swelling in your neck, face, chest or arm are cause for concern. Call your healthcare professional if you experience any of these.

If you are receiving daily medications through your PICC line at home, you may need to flush the line before and after the medication. You should be given specific instructions on how to do this by your healthcare provider. If you're having trouble flushing or inserting fluids through the line, don't force it. Prior to going home with a PICC line, you should have been informed about who to contact in case you have problems with your PICC line. Call them.

When it comes to showering, follow your healthcare professional's orders. This may include covering the PICC line bandage with plastic to keep it dry. You will not be able to bathe or swim while the catheter is in. One other point to remember. Avoid lifting or any kind of activity that may loosen your PICC line. If it does become loose, make sure to call your PICC line contact right away.