

Patient Information

PICC Line Insertion

What is a PICC Line?

A Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter (PICC), also called a PICC line, is a long, thin tube that is inserted through a vein in your arm and passed through to the larger veins near your heart.

With a catheter in place, treatments such as antibiotics can be given through the catheter over a period of time without the need for repeated injections. A catheter can also be used when regular blood samples are needed, for blood transfusions, and other medical conditions that require access to a vein for a period of time.

Preparation

No preparation is required although it is important to contact us and let us know if you are taking any blood thinning medications or have any drug allergies prior to the appointment.

If your doctor has requested this as an outpatient, you will be admitted to Day Stay under your private health insurance. You will need to present to admissions on Level 1 and our porters will bring you down from the ward on a bed.

How long will it take?

The procedure usually takes about an hour.

What to expect

During the PICC line insertion you'll lie down on your back with your arm extended to your side. You'll be awake during the procedure, but local anaesthetic will be used to minimise discomfort.

The area of skin around the site of the venous access will be cleaned. A local anaesthetic is then injected to numb the skin at the site of the venous access.

Using ultrasound guidance, a small incision is made in your skin. A needle is then inserted. Once the vein has been accessed, x-ray images are used to guide various specialised flexible wires, small plastic sheaths and the venous access catheter. The tip of the catheter is placed deep into the central vein and positioned accurately using x-ray images.

Occasionally, x-ray contrast may be injected in the catheter to show the veins.

After Your Examination

After a PICC line insertion, a porter will return you to your ward. There may be some tenderness in the area where the catheter enters your arm. It should go away within a few days.

As you adjust to life with a PICC line, you'll need to consider:

- PICC line protection - Your doctor may recommend specific ways to protect the arm with the PICC line. For instance, don't lift heavy objects and don't have blood pressure readings taken on the affected arm. Avoid submerging the PICC line in water.
- PICC line care - A nurse or other provider will show you how to care for your PICC line. This might involve checking the area daily for signs of infection and flushing the line with solution weekly to keep it clear from clogs. It is likely your ward nurse will take care of this for you.
- PICC line covers - You'll need to cover your PICC line when you take a shower, as the area shouldn't get wet. Your nurse will provide a cover.

Possible Side-Effects and Complications

- Bleeding
- Nerve injury
- Irregular heart beat
- Damage to veins in your arm
- Blood clots
- Infection
- Blocked or broken PICC

Some complications can be treated so that your PICC line can remain in place. Other complications might require removing the PICC line. Depending on your situation, your doctor might recommend placing another PICC line or using a different type of central venous catheter.

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Generally, the PICC line will only stay in place while you are a patient at North Shore Private Hospital. If you are discharged with the PICC line in place, you should contact your doctor right away if you notice any signs or symptoms of PICC line complications, such as if:

- The area around your PICC line is increasingly red, swollen, bruised or warm to the touch
- You develop a fever or shortness of breath
- The length of the catheter that sticks out of your arm gets longer
- You have difficulty flushing your PICC line because it seems to be blocked
- You notice changes in your heartbeat

PICC line removal

Your PICC line can be removed when your treatment ends. To remove the line, a doctor or nurse gently pulls on the end of the catheter to remove it from your arm.

PICC line removal reduces your risk of complications, such as infection. But if there's a chance you may need a PICC line again, your doctor may recommend keeping it in place. That's because repeatedly placing the PICC line increases the risk of damage to your veins.

Questions?

You will be given the opportunity to ask any questions of the technicians or radiologist at the time of your procedure, however if you have any queries prior to the appointment, please feel free to contact us by phone or email – 02 9170 4500 or contact@nsrnm.com.au

If you have any questions regarding **why** the PICC line insertion is required, these should be directed to your specialist or the doctor looking after you. We are happy to re-schedule your booking so you can discuss it with your doctor.

