

Flushing and Dressing a Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter (PICC Line)

Patient Information

Introduction

This booklet has been written to provide information to patients with a Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter (PICC) in place, it tells you how to flush and dress your PICC. It is not meant to replace the discussion between you and the nursing team treating you, but helps you to understand more about what is discussed.

You will have been shown how to flush and dress your PICC **before** you left hospital. When you return home, read this leaflet through from start to finish before you attempt to flush or dress your PICC. **Make sure you are happy with the steps involved before you attempt the procedure. If you are unsure, contact your nurse for advice.**

Why do I need to flush my PICC?

When a PICC is not being used there is a small risk that it may become blocked. To stop this happening, a small amount of fluid is 'flushed' into the catheter using a syringe. If you have a dressing on the site it will need to be changed once a week to reduce the risk of infection. As it is difficult to do this yourself, the nurses at the hospital may do it for you or arrange for a district nurse to visit you at home. A partner, relative or friend can also be taught to do this if they feel happy to.

How often do I need to flush my PICC?

Your PICC will need to be flushed once a week.

What solution do I use to flush my PICC?

You will either need to flush your PICC with:

- Saline, **or**
- Saline and then with Heparin.

You will have been informed of whether you need to flush your PICC with one or both of these solutions.

What type of bung does my PICC have?

The end of your PICC will always have a bung attached. PICCs have two different types of bung. It is important that you know which type of bung your PICC has before you flush it. If you are unsure, please ask your nurse. You will have either:

- **A needle free bung** – you can attach a syringe to the end of this type of bung, **or**
- **A bung** – syringes cannot be attached to this type of bung, it needs to be removed before flushing.

1. Equipment you will need to flush your PICC

Before you flush your PICC, you will need the following items which will be given to you free of charge by the nursing staff:

- A dressing pack containing gloves and a paper towel.
- Chloraprep stick.
- Gauze.
- One dressing (a transparent occlusive dressing – a dressing that protects your wound).
- Two pairs of gloves.
- 10 mL syringe(s), 1 syringe to withdraw blood and 1 syringe to flush with saline and if you need to flush your PICC line with saline and Heparin, you will have 3 syringes in total. **Do not use anything smaller than a 10 mL syringe when flushing a central catheter.**
- Blue or filter needle(s). If you need to flush your PICC with saline, you will have 1 needle. If you need to flush your PICC with saline and Heparin, you will have 2 needles.
- 10 mL of 0.9% saline (please check the expiry date before use).
- Heparin flush e.g. Hepsal (10 units per mL) or Canusal (200 units in 2 mL). Please check the expiry date before use. If you do not need to flush your catheter with Heparin, you will not have been given this item.
- Two alcowipes/chlorhexidine in alcohol swab.
- A bung or needle free connector e.g. a bionnector / microclave.
- Steri-strips.
- A sharps bin.

2. Preparation for flushing your PICC

Whilst you are flushing your PICC it is important that all of the items remain sterile. You will have been shown how to ensure this by the nursing staff before you left hospital. You may find it useful to have bowl of water, soap and a towel close by as you will need to wash your hands. Flushing your PICC will take approximately 5 minutes in total. Try to ensure that you will not be disturbed whilst you are doing this.

- You should identify an area in your home where you feel safe to flush your catheter without interruption. Preferably, this should be an area with a table or work surface. This surface should be thoroughly cleaned to reduce your risk of infection.

- Wash your hands thoroughly and then open the dressing pack.
- Open and place all of the other items onto the dressing pack.
- Wash your hands again and put on the gloves.
- Draw up the saline with a needle into a syringe. **If you also need to flush your PICC with Heparin, draw up the Heparin into a separate syringe.** Discard the used needle into the sharps bin.
- Pick up and clean the end of your PICC with an alcowipe/chlorhexidine in alcohol swab. If your PICC has a clamp, ensure that this is shut.
- Place the PICC onto the towel. If the end of the PICC is very short, wrap the towel around your arm and place the end of the PICC on top of it. Pick up the end of the PICC with a new alcowipe/chlorhexidine in alcohol swabs.
 1. **If a needle free bung is in place** leave this on and clean it thoroughly with the alcowipe/chlorhexidine in alcohol swabs.
 2. **If a bung is in place** remove and discard this. This should be changed once a week – clean the end of the catheter with alcowipe/chlorhexidine in alcohol swabs.

3. How to flush your PICC

- Attach an empty 10 mL syringe, unclamp line (if applicable) and using the syringe aspirate 5 - 10 mL of blood and discard.
- Attach the syringe containing 0.9% sodium chloride, if the catheter has a clamp, open it and slowly flush in the solution using a pulsating action (stop/start), then close the clamp whilst injecting the final 1 mL of saline. You will have been shown how to do this by the nursing staff before you left hospital.
- **If Heparin flush is also required** attach the syringe of Heparin. If your PICC has a clamp, open it and slowly flush in the solution using a pulsating action (stop/start). Close the clamp whilst injecting the final 1 mL of Heparin. You will have been shown how to do this by the nursing team before you left hospital.

If the PICC will not flush:

1. Check if the catheter is kinked, twisted or bent. If so, straighten it and try again.
2. If the catheter has a clamp, check that it is open.
3. If these fail, please contact the hospital nursing team for advice.
4. Never force solution into the catheter.

- **If a needle free bung is in place**, you can now remove and discard it. Clean the end of the PICC again with alcowipe/chlorhexidine in alcohol swabs. Attach a new bung or needle free connector.
- Empty infusion devices, bags or syringes that are used for the administration of chemotherapy drugs or for flushing your line should be disposed of in the sharps bins. Once the sharps bin is three-quarter full, it should be sealed and returned to the hospital ward/clinic on your next visit.

4. How to dress your PICC

Dressing your PICC will take approximately 5 minutes in total. Ensure that you will not be disturbed whilst you are doing this.

- Wash and dry your hands and put on a pair of gloves
- Remove the old dressing carefully and discard, remove gloves
- Wash and dry hands again and put on gloves
- Clean the insertion site on your arm with the chloraprep stick and allow this to dry.
- If you have been advised to do so, apply steri-strips to the area just below where the catheter leaves your body.
- Place a gauze swab between the bung and your skin to prevent any discomfort once the dressing is in place.
- Place the transparent dressing so that it completely covers the catheter, this will provide a waterproof barrier.

Flushing and dressing your PICC should be completely pain free and should take about 10 minutes in total but do not worry if it takes you longer at first. If you have any queries or concerns about any aspect of care of your PICC, please contact your nursing team

on: _____

Glossary of medical terms:

AlcOWipe: a skin cleansing swab containing alcohol.

Anticoagulant: any substance that prevents blood clotting.

Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter (PICC): a PICC is a thin flexible tube that is used to give you treatments such as chemotherapy, antibiotics and/or intravenous (IV) fluids. A PICC can also be used for taking blood samples.

Clamp: a device for compressing/closing the catheter.

District nurse: a nurse that can visit you in your own home.

Dressing: a protective covering on a sore or wound.

Flushing: passing liquid through a Central catheter when it is not being used, via a syringe, to prevent it from becoming blocked.

Heparin: a solution which prevents blood from clotting.

Lumen: the cavity or channel within a tube.

Saline: a salt water solution.

Local sources of further information

You can visit any of the health/cancer information centres listed below:

Birmingham Women's NHS Foundation Trust

Health Information Centre

Birmingham Women's Healthcare NHS FoundationTrust

Metchley Park Road

Edgbaston

Birmingham B15 2TG

Telephone: 0121 627 2608

Heart of England NHS Foundation Trust

Health Information Centre

Birmingham Heartlands Hospital

Bordesley Green

Birmingham B9 5SS

Telephone: 0121 424 2280

Cancer Information and Support Centre

Good Hope Hospital
Rectory Road
Sutton Coldfield B75 7RR
Telephone: 0121 424 9486

Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust

The Courtyard Centre
Sandwell General Hospital (Main Reception)
Lyndon
West Bromwich B71 4HJ
Telephone: 0121 507 3792
Fax: 0121 507 3816

University Hospital Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust

The Patrick Room
Cancer Centre
University Hospital Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust
Queen Elizabeth Hospital
Edgbaston
Birmingham B15 2TH
Telephone: 0121 697 8417

Walsall Primary Care Trust

Cancer Information & Support Services
Challenge Building
Hatherton Street
Walsall WS1 1YB
Freephone: 0800 783 9050

About this information

This guide is provided for general information only and is not a substitute for professional medical advice. Every effort is taken to ensure that this information is accurate and consistent with current knowledge and practice at the time of publication. We are constantly striving to improve the quality of our information. If you have a suggestion about how this information can be improved, please contact us via our website:

<http://www.birminghamcancer.nhs.uk>.

This information was produced by Pan Birmingham Cancer Network and was written by Consultant Surgeons, Clinical Nurse Specialists, Allied Health Professionals, Patients and Carers from the following Trusts:

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