PICC Line Placement
(Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter)

What is a PICC line?
A peripherally inserted central catheter (PICC) is a very thin plastic tube. It is used to either give you medicine or to draw blood from you. When you have a PICC, the catheter will be placed in a vein in your arm. The end of the catheter will rest in a vein in your upper chest near your heart.

Most common risks
- Mild pain when the numbing medicine is given and when the PICC needle is inserted.
- Mild bleeding or bruising where the PICC needle is inserted.
- If the veins in your arm are small or fragile, it may be hard to insert the PICC line. If this happens, it may be necessary to use a different vein or you may need to go to the X-ray department to have the PICC line put in.

Less common risks
- An artery, nerve or tendon may be punctured during insertion and may cause bleeding, tingling, numbness or pain. Sometimes, if there is bleeding under the skin, a large swelling may occur.
- A blood clot may form in your vein and block the tip of the PICC. If this happens, you may need medicine to help break up the clot. Your PICC line may need to be removed.
- You may have an irregular heartbeat during the procedure because the PICC line is placed close to your heart. This goes away when the PICC is moved to another spot.
- Sometimes the PICC line can slide out of the good position where it was placed. The PICC line can usually be repositioned.
- Your vein may become irritated or inflamed. An infection may develop in your vein or where the PICC line enters your skin. You may need antibiotics or the PICC line may have to be removed.

Serious risks that happen very rarely
- A blood clot, a large air bubble or a small piece of the PICC line may break off and travel to other parts of your body through your vein. This may cause serious problems if it travels to your lungs or other organs.

What are the benefits of having a PICC line?
The benefits of having a PICC line are:
- A PICC line is safe for long-term use. You can receive medicine or liquid nutrition through your PICC for up to one year if needed.
- A PICC line has a lower risk for infection than the other options listed on page 2.
- A PICC line can be used to draw blood for lab tests so you do not need repeated needle sticks.
- A PICC line can be cared for at home.

What are the risks of a PICC line?
With every medical procedure there is a chance that problems may happen. This is called ‘the risk’ for the procedure. Your health care team will use safety measures to lower the chance of you having a problem. Here are the risks you should consider when you have a PICC line:
What are other options to a PICC Line?
A PICC line is one way for you to get your medicines but it may not be the only way. There are also other kinds of catheters.
• A regular catheter can be put into a vein in your hand or arm. This catheter will have to be changed often. Many times this type of catheter cannot be used for certain drugs.
• A catheter can be put in your neck, upper chest or groin area. This type of catheter is for short-term use and requires you to stay in the hospital. This type of catheter may not be used for all patients.
• A catheter can be placed under your skin for long-term use. This type of catheter is placed in the operating room by a surgeon or by specially trained caregivers.

Your health care team has decided that, at this time, the safest and easiest way for you to get your medicine is with a PICC.

How is a PICC line inserted?
PICC lines are inserted in the X-ray department, in your hospital room, or in an outpatient IV therapy clinic. An ultrasound machine is used to find the best vein for the insertion site. The staff will take steps to make sure your risk of infection is very low during the procedure.

You will see the staff:
• Wash their hands and put on a gown, gloves, hat and a mask before the procedure.
• Clean your skin with an approved antiseptic.
• Cover your entire body with a drape and place a sterile cloth around the spot on your skin where they choose to place the PICC line.
• Apply a special antiseptic patch on the spot where the PICC enters your skin to help protect against infection.

The PICC line procedure will take about one hour. The pain you will feel will be the same as you would feel when an IV is started. A numbing medicine is used to help lessen the pain.

An X-ray is done right after the procedure to make sure the PICC line is in the right place. Stitches or a sticky patch is used to hold the PICC line in place.

Do I need to sign a consent form?
Putting in a PICC line is an “invasive procedure” which means something is put into your body. You will be asked to sign a consent form stating that you have had the procedure explained to you and that you understand the risks, benefits and options. The doctor ordering the PICC line will talk to you about the risks, benefits and options. Please ask any questions you have.

How do I care for my PICC line?
• Keep your dressing dry and in place. A small part of the PICC line is left outside of the body. You may have one, two or three lines coming out of your arm. A sterile dressing will be put over the site. The dressing will protect your skin and PICC line from getting infected. It will also help keep the PICC line from moving or breaking.

• Rest your arm and do not do any lifting for 1 to 2 days. Your arm may be a little uncomfortable for the next couple days.

• Cover the dressing with clear plastic wrap and tape to keep it dry before showering or bathing. No swimming. No hot tubs.

When you get home, a home care nurse, your doctor’s office staff or another health care provider will care for your PICC line. You may be trained to take care of the line yourself.

What if I have problems with my PICC line?
Call your doctor right away if you:
• Have pain, warmth, redness or swelling along the arm or at the PICC line site.
• Have a fever.
• Notice drainage from the PICC line site.
• Have a large amount of bright red bleeding (dressing soaked with blood).
• Notice the PICC line is farther out than before.
• Notice a tear or break in the PICC line tubing.