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Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter Lines: Information for Parents

A peripherally inserted central catheter (PICC) is a very thin intravenous (IV) catheter that is inserted in a vein in the arm, leg, or scalp of an infant. A PICC line is used in infants who will need total IV nutrition or medication for more than 7 days. It is usually placed within the first week after birth. A PICC can remain in place for weeks or for as long as the baby needs it.

When your baby is having a PICC inserted, the procedure consists of placing a very slim, soft catheter into an arm, leg, or scalp vein, and then advancing the catheter into a larger vein close to the heart. Once the line is in place, an X ray is done to make sure the position is correct before it is used. Having a PICC line alleviates the need for frequent IV insertions, reducing the number of sticks your baby will receive. Insertion of a PICC line is usually based on the needs of your baby. It is not an emergent procedure and parental consent is necessary.

# Procedure

Most neonatal intensive care units (NICUs) have a neonatal PICC team who will insert the PICC lines. A physician, nurse practitioner, or a nurse from the PICC team will explain the risks and benefits of the procedure as part of obtaining parental consent.

The entire process of inserting a PICC line may take 30 minutes to 1 hour, but it may take longer to make sure the catheter is in the correct position. The procedure is done under sterile (free from germs) technique and placement is usually done at your baby’s bedside. Prior to the start of the procedure, your baby will be swaddled or wrapped snuggly in a blanket and given sucrose (sweet water), a pacifier, and other pain medicines to keep your baby comfortable during the procedure. After the initial skin stick, your baby should not experience any pain. Your baby will be draped from head to toe with sterile towels/drapes with only the arm/leg/scalp site exposed. Your baby’s skin will be washed with a solution to prevent infection. Once the catheter is in place, an X ray will be done to make sure the tip is in a good location. Then, a sterile dressing will cover the line on your baby’s skin to help prevent infections.

# Alternatives to PICC Lines

For babies who need total IV nutrition, the only alternative to a PICC line is having frequent or repeated IVs inserted. While the staff can make sure your baby has pain control with IV sticks, frequent sticks can increase your baby’s risk of infection.

# PICC Line Removal

Removal of a PICC line usually is a simple procedure and does not cause much pain to your baby. A PICC line will be removed as soon as your baby no longer needs it. Usually, this is when a baby no longer needs IV medications or when the infant is receiving full nutrition from either mom’s breast milk or formula (by bottle or a feeding tube). Once the line is removed, pressure will be applied to the site and the site will be monitored for bleeding.



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