

# Insertion of a central venous catheter or PICC line



You will soon have a central venous catheter inserted. This fact sheet explains how this is done and how to prepare for it. It also tells you what precautions to take and what to watch for at home once the catheter is in place.

## What is a central venous catheter?

It's a long, thin, flexible tube that enters through a vein in your arm and goes to a large vein near your heart. It's generally inserted in the Radiology Department.

## What is this catheter for?

It's inserted when patients need to receive treatment many times through their veins (intravenously). This way, you won't need to be needlesticked every time you receive the treatment. The catheter can be inserted to receive:

- chemotherapy
- antibiotics
- nutritional supplements
- other medications

## Are their risks associated with the insertion?

Installing a central venous catheter is a simple procedure and complications are rare.

Once your catheter is in place, however, it's important to follow the instructions described in this fact sheet. This will prevent problems such as infection or catheter blockage.

## Where do I go on the day of the intervention?

You should go to the following location:

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## Are there any precautions to take BEFORE the catheter is inserted?

You must inform the medical imaging technologist who will be working on you if:

- you are taking a medication to thin your blood, an anticoagulant (e.g. Coumadin or Pradax)
- you have had breast surgery
- you are on dialysis and have an arteriovenous fistula
- you have ever had a blocked vein due to a blood clot (phlebitis) in a calf or arm, for example
- you have allergies (e.g. to iodinated contrast agents)

**On the day the catheter is inserted, bring a list of your medications. You don't need to fast before the insertion.**

## How much time does the insertion take?

You should allow about 1 hour in total. The catheter insertion takes about 15 minutes. The rest of the time is for preparation.



## What are the steps involved in the insertion?

- > You will lie on your back on an examination table.
- > The skin where the catheter will enter will be disinfected.
- > An ultrasound scan of your arm will be done to determine which vein to use.
- > The area of your arm where the catheter is to be inserted will be “frozen” (anaesthetized).

- > Using a needle, the doctor will insert into your vein a small guide that will then be used to position the catheter.
- > The doctor will insert the catheter onto this guide and into your vein, then push until the tip of the catheter is in a large vein.
- > He or she will attach the catheter to your arm with two stitches or a stabilizing dressing.
- > An x-ray will be done to verify the position of the catheter.

You may feel pressure and slight discomfort during the catheter insertion.

## What should I expect once the catheter is inserted?

A dressing will cover the area where the catheter was inserted into your arm. There could be some blood leakage.

This dressing will be changed by the CLSC nurse within the next 24 hours. After that, the nurse will change it once a week and as needed.

For the catheter to work properly, it must be cared for regularly. Every week, you will have an appointment with a nurse at the CLSC. She will do the maintenance. This follow-up is very important.



### IMPORTANT

- **Your dressing should always be clean and dry.**
- **Never change it yourself!** If you remove your dressing, you might move the catheter and increase the risk of infection. If you need to replace it quickly, call the CLSC nurse. If it has come unstuck, put an adhesive dressing over it to help keep it in place until you can see a health professional.





**What should I do if I feel a slight pain in the arm?**

It's normal to feel a slight pain because your vein may be irritated. In this case:

- Don't bend you arm for 2 to 3 hours after the insertion.
- Every 3 hours, apply heat to your arm, above the elbow, for 20 minutes. Use a Magic Bag, available in pharmacies. Be careful not to overheat it so as not to burn yourself.

**What should I do if there is blood under the dressing?**

- Apply pressure on the dressing for about 5 minutes with a compress or dry washcloth.
- If after these 5 minutes blood is flowing out from the dressing, contact the CLSC as soon as possible to have your dressing changed. Outside CLSC business hours, call Info-Santé at **8-1-1**.

**How can I wash myself?**

When washing, cover the catheter and dressing with food grade plastic wrap (e.g. Saran Wrap) or a plastic bag. Secure everything with an adhesive dressing so no water can get in.

- > If you take baths, don't put your arm or the catheter in the water.
- > If you shower, don't aim the water spray at the arm where the catheter is located.

**What should I watch for every day?**

Check the following 4 points. If you answer **YES to any of these questions, call your CLSC nurse right away**. He or she will guide you. If it's not possible to talk to someone quickly, call Info-Santé at **8-1-1**.

**YES**

**1 Dressing**

- Is it soiled, wet, or unstuck?
- Is there liquid leaking around it?

**2 Skin around the catheter**

- Is it red or swollen?
- Is it very sensitive?
- Is there any leaking?

**3 Arm**

- Is it still painful, even after applying heat on it?
- Is it red or swollen?

**4 General health status**

- Do you have fever?
- Do you have trouble breathing, are you dizzy or anxious?
- Do you have any other signs that worry you?

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**Do you think your stitches are loose? Call the Radiology Department (see contact information on page 4).**

## What precautions should I take in my daily activities?

- Don't lift heavy objects.
- Avoid playing intense sports.
- Don't make any sudden or repeated movements, and don't bend the arm where the catheter is too often.

## How long will I have to keep the catheter?

That will depend on your state of health and your treatments. You may need to keep it for several weeks to several months.

## Who can I contact for help or to ask questions?

- Your CLSC nurse
  - The Info-Santé service, at **8-1-1** (24 heures sur 24, 7 jours sur 7)
  - The Radiology Department, Monday to Friday, between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.:
- > **514 890-8450**



## USEFUL RESOURCES

Other health sheets published by the CHUM are available. Ask for those that might fit your situation.



You can also find them on our web site [chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante](http://chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante)



## NOTEPAD



### Questions




### Resource people and contacts


*The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.*

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal  
[chumontreal.qc.ca](http://chumontreal.qc.ca)

