

Venous Access for Chemotherapy

This handout explains what can happen when chemotherapy leaks outside of the vein and describes why your doctor may recommend a central line to make treatment safer and easier. It also lists the benefits and risks of having a central line and what symptoms to watch for and when to call your care team.

Extravasation

Sometimes, chemotherapy medication can leak out of your vein and into the skin around it. This is called extravasation. If this happens, the area around your intravenous line (IV) line can become sore, red or swollen. An IV line is a small tube placed into your vein that is used to give medications or fluids directly into your bloodstream.

Types of chemotherapy medications include:

- › **Irritants:** These medications can cause redness, warmth, swelling or soreness near the IV site. These symptoms are usually mild and go away on their own. They rarely cause lasting damage to the skin.
- › **Vesicants:** These medications can harm the skin if they leak out of the vein. They may cause redness, blisters or pain. The amount of damage to the skin depends on how much medication leaks out of the vein. Symptoms can start during or after your treatment.

Central line risks and benefits

To lower the risk of medication leaking outside the vein, your doctor may suggest you get a central line. This is a soft tube the doctor places in a large vein near your heart. Your doctor may recommend this if:

- › You are getting vesicant medicine
- › Your veins are hard to find or use
- › You need treatment for a long time

Types of central lines include:

- › Peripherally inserted central catheter (PICC) (Figure 1): Can stay in for weeks or months
- › Implantable port (Figure 2): Can stay in for months or years

Figure 1. PICC

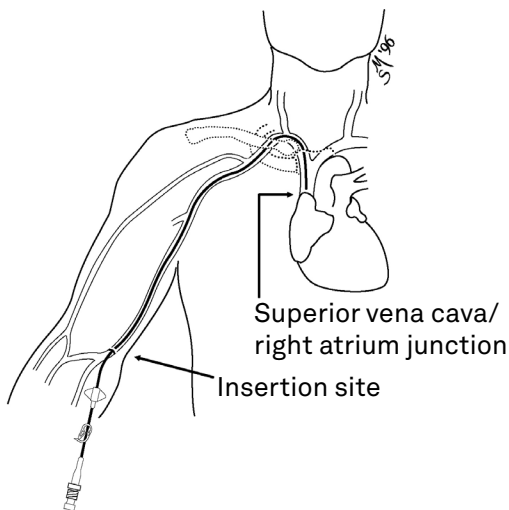
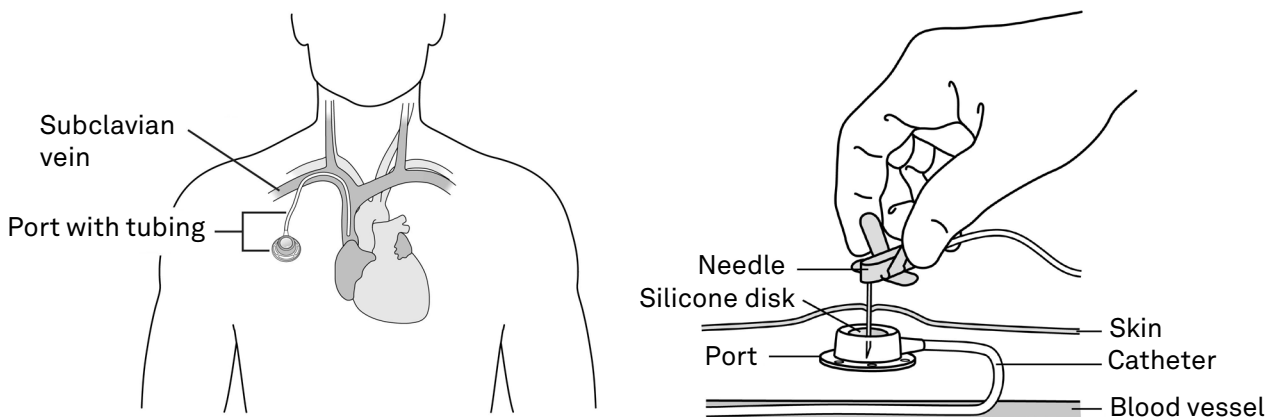


Figure 2. Implantable port, position and access



The benefits of having a central line are:

- › Fewer needle sticks
- › Can deliver more than 1 medication at the same time
- › Lowers the risk of chemotherapy medications leaking out of the vein and harming your skin
- › Can be used for blood draws

The risks of a central line are:

- › Infection
- › Blood clots in or around the line
- › Trouble flushing the line
- › Leaks or breaks in the line
- › The line moving out of place

Before treatment starts, ask your doctor:

- › If the medication you are getting is a vesicant
- › What signs of trouble you should watch for

When to call your doctor

Call your doctor right away if you notice:

- › Itching, rash or hives after your treatment
- › Wheezing, trouble breathing or chest pain
- › Temperature more than 100.4 degrees F
- › Redness, pain or swelling near your IV site

Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department if you have these symptoms:

- Chest pain or tightness
- Trouble breathing that does not improve with rest
- Loss of consciousness

If you have questions or concerns, call your care team at 312.695.0990 (TTY: 711) or send a message through MyNM.

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