

Having an Indwelling Pleural Catheter (IPC)



Fluid around your lung is called a pleural effusion. It can make you short of breath by preventing your lung from opening up fully during breathing. One treatment for this problem involves putting a catheter into the fluid and draining it out. A catheter is a thin, flexible tube.

What is pleural effusion?

The pleura are 2 layers of thin, smooth tissue around the lungs and lining the chest. This area between these layers is called the pleural space. The pleural space normally has a small amount of fluid. This fluid lubricates the pleura as you breathe. Pleural effusion means that you have too much fluid between the pleura. If too much fluid fills the space, this can make it hard to breathe or cause pain.

Getting the pleural catheter

The indwelling pleural catheter (IPC) is put in place with a minor surgery. Your skin is cleaned and numbed with medicine. The healthcare provider makes a small cut (incision) in your skin. They gently put the catheter through the incision into the pleural space. They use ultrasound or other imaging to guide this process. One end of the tube stays outside your skin. A small piece of extra material on the tube just inside the skin helps it stay in place. This piece of extra material is called a cuff.

The catheter will drain extra fluid and ease your breathing symptoms. It can be attached to a small bottle when it's time to drain fluid. When not being used, the catheter is coiled next to your skin and covered with a dressing. The catheter will be left in place for weeks or months. Your healthcare team will tell you how long it will stay in place.

Caring for your pleural catheter

- Drain fluid with the catheter system exactly as instructed by your healthcare team. You may need to do this every 1 to 2 days.
- You can shower if your catheter site is fully covered with a secure dressing that sticks to your skin. Make sure there are no gaps around the edge where it sticks to your skin. Follow any instructions from your healthcare team.
- Don't let your catheter go underwater. This includes in a bathtub or pool.
- If any part of the padding under the dressing gets wet, you will need to remove it. Change it for dry padding as instructed.

Preventing infection

While you have an IPC, the areas affected by the catheter are at risk for infection. If you have signs of infection, you will need to take antibiotic medicine.

To help prevent infection:

- Wash your hands before you touch the dressing or catheter.
- When draining fluid, use only clean supplies set up in a clean area.
- Make sure the catheter is always clean, dry, and covered when you are not draining fluid.
- Don't go into a pool or hot tub.

Watch for signs of infection. These can include:

- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as directed by your provider
- Pain that gets worse
- Redness, swelling, fluid, or warmth where the catheter goes into your skin
- Changes in the way the fluid looks

When to call your healthcare provider

Call your healthcare provider right away if any of these happen:

- You have signs of infection (see above)
- The small cuff just inside your skin has pulled out
- The catheter has started to pull out
- Not much fluid is draining
- You still find it hard to breathe after draining fluid
- Your symptoms don't get better, or get worse

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