

# Flushing Your PICC Line at Home



Your peripherally inserted central catheter (PICC) line is used to deliver medicine or feedings. It's a long, flexible tube (catheter) that goes into your vein, runs into larger veins, and ends up with the tip near where the superior vena cava enters your heart. To care for your PICC line, you will need to flush it. This means you'll need to clean it with a solution as directed by your healthcare provider. This keeps it from getting clogged or blocked. A clogged or blocked PICC line will need to be taken out and replaced.

## When to flush your PICC line

You'll need to flush your PICC line as often as directed by your healthcare provider. You may need to flush it after each use. If the PICC line is not in active use, you may need to flush it once a day. Or you may only need to flush it once a week. Talk with your healthcare provider about how often you should do this.

## What you'll need

- Flushing solution. This is the liquid that you will send through the PICC line. Your healthcare provider will tell you what kind to use. In most cases, it is saline solution. This is a sterile mix of water and a tiny amount of salt. Your healthcare provider will also tell you how much to use. You may also need to flush with a heparin solution after the saline. Heparin is a medicine that thins the blood. It helps prevent blood from clotting in and around the catheter.
- A syringe. This is the device used to give an injection, or shot. A syringe is used to flush your PICC line with the solution. You will probably use prefilled syringes.
- Alcohol wipes or rubbing alcohol and cotton balls. You'll use these to clean some of the tools used to flush your line. This helps to prevent germs from going into your PICC line.
- Clean medical gloves.

## How to flush your PICC line

Repeat these steps as often as your healthcare provider has instructed. Skip steps 2 and 3 if you are using prefilled syringes.

### Step 1. Wash your hands

- Wash your hands well with soap and clean running water for at least 20 seconds. Scrub them well, including the backs of your hands and between your fingers.
- If you don't have access to soap and water, use an alcohol-based hand gel. The gel should have at least 60% alcohol. Let the hands dry.
- Put on clean medical gloves.
- Only touch your PICC line with clean hands and when wearing clean gloves. This is to protect you from infection and to keep the line free from germs.

### Step 2. Fill the syringe

- Open a new bottle of the flushing solution. If you're using a bottle that's already open, use the alcohol to clean the top of the bottle.
- Remove the cap from the needle or tip of the syringe. Push the plunger of the syringe down all the way.

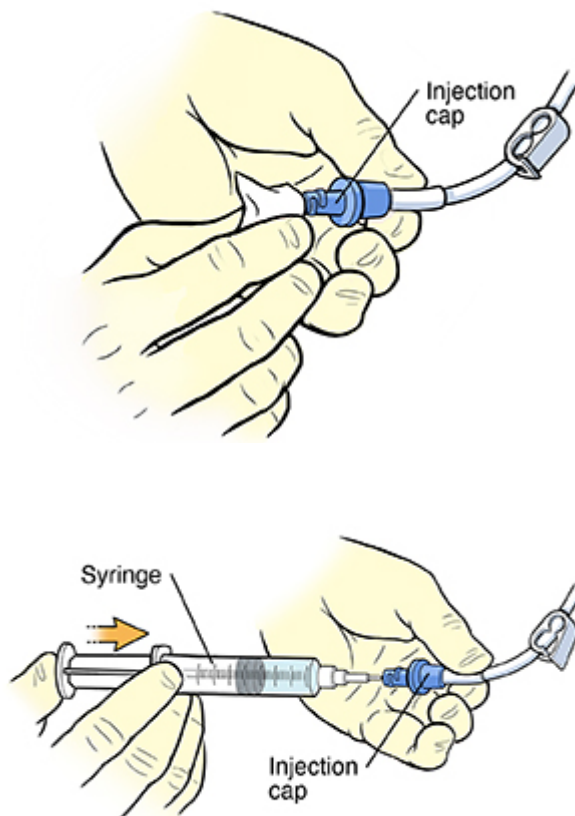
- Put the needle or tip of the syringe into the flushing solution.
- Pull the syringe plunger out. Stop when you have the right amount of flushing solution in the syringe. Your healthcare provider will tell you how much to use.

### Step 3. Remove air from the syringe

- Hold the syringe with the tip pointing up.
- Flick or tap the syringe with your finger. This will cause any large air bubbles to rise into the tip.
- Slowly push on the plunger until a tiny drop of flushing solution comes out of the needle or tip.
- Put the cap back on the needle or tip of the syringe. This will keep it germ-free until you use it.

### Step 4. Inject the flushing solution

- Scrub the top and sides of the port (end of the catheter) with an alcohol wipe for 15 seconds. Scrub using a twisting motion as if juicing an orange. Let it dry completely. Prevent it from touching anything while drying. Don't blow on it. Don't reuse the alcohol wipe. Keep the port from touching anything until you connect the syringe. If you accidentally touch the port, clean it again.
- Open the clamp, if there is one.
- Take the cap off the needle or tip of the syringe. Insert the needle or tip into the port. Make sure you know if your PICC has a needleless connector. Ask your healthcare provider if you aren't sure.
- Push the plunger in slowly and smoothly. Don't force the plunger. You shouldn't feel any pressure when you push the fluid into the PICC line. If you do, stop and call your healthcare provider right away.



## Step 5. Finish flushing

- If there is a clamp, close it just before the syringe is empty. This stops blood from flowing back into the catheter.
- Remove the needle or tip of the syringe from the port.
- Put the syringe into a special container (sharps container).

## When to call your healthcare provider

Call your healthcare provider right away if you have:

- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as directed by your healthcare provider
- Chills during or after flushing your line
- Swelling, redness, drainage, or pain around the PICC site
- Bleeding from the PICC site
- Tubing that leaks or is pulling out
- A feeling of new resistance when flushing the PICC line, or can't flush it at all
- Medicine or fluids that don't drain from the bag into your PICC

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