

Indwelling Pleural Catheter

Information for patients and families

Key points

- An indwelling pleural catheter drains fluid from the space around your lungs
- The catheter can stay in place as long as needed and managed at home

What is an indwelling pleural catheter?

A small tube which drains fluid from the area around your lungs. The tube stays in place for as long as needed, so that the fluid can be drained easily and avoids further procedures, for example the repeated use of needles to drain the fluid.

Why do I need this and what are the benefits?

The pleural space is the space between the lung and the inner lining of the chest, and these layers lie very close together, but fluid can collect in the space. This can affect your lungs and cause shortness of breath.

Draining the fluid can help relieve shortness of breath, however the fluid can return. The tube allows fluid to be drained painlessly, as often as necessary and without having to come to hospital.

How is the IPC put in place?

You will need to come into hospital for the procedure. You will be given local anaesthetic to make the procedure more comfortable and antibiotics may be given to reduce the risk of infection.

You will be asked to lie in a comfortable position. Sedative medication may be given through a small needle in your skin to make you feel relaxed and drowsy. An ultrasound scanner is used to help guide the procedure.

Your skin will be cleaned with a cold antiseptic solution to kill any bacteria. A local anaesthetic is then injected into the skin to numb the area where the catheter will be placed. This can feel like a sting, but the discomfort passes quickly. The doctor will make two small cuts in the numb area of skin and open a path for the tube. This should not be painful although you may feel some pressure or tugging. One cut is for the tube to pass through the skin and the second is for it to be passed into the chest. The tube is then eased into the chest cavity. At the end of the procedure your chest may feel sore for 2-3 days. Pain killers will help with this.

You may be able to leave hospital on the same day as the procedure. Sometimes you may need to stay in overnight. Your doctor will discuss this with you.

How is the fluid drained?

The tube is soft, flexible and about the width of a pencil. One end stays inside the chest and the other passes out through the skin on the side of your lower chest. There is a one-way valve on the end which stops fluid leakage and prevents air going into the tube. Hospital in the Home can be organised to come to your home to drain the fluid. Drainage can be a part of your clinic visit and the staff can teach you or your carer to do home drainage.

How does the drain stay in place?

There is a soft cuff around the tube which is positioned under the skin. As the skin heals the drain becomes more secure. Two stitches will be put in place when your tube is inserted. These will be removed after 7 to 10 days at which time the tube will stay in place on its own.

Are there any risks with IPC insertion?

In most cases the insertion of a chest drain and its use is routine and safe. There are small risks, like all medical procedures. All of these can be treated by your doctors and nurses:

- Sometimes the tube can become infected but this is uncommon. The main risk is infection entering the chest down the tube. The risk is reduced by careful cleaning of the tube and area. You will be shown how to do this. Check the site daily for signs of infection such as redness, swelling, oozing and whether you have pain or a fever. If you think there is tell your respiratory doctor/nurse as soon as possible, as you may need a course of antibiotics
- Every time a drainage procedure is performed there is a possibility that it may cause bleeding. However, having a tube inserted reduces the number of drainages needed and reduces your overall risks. Sometimes cancer tissue can affect the area around the tube. Please let your doctor know if you develop a lump, or any pain, around your tube in the weeks after it is inserted. If this happens the cancer tissue can easily be treated with radiotherapy.

Can I wash and shower normally?

After insertion of the tube a dressing is placed over the catheter. Although the dressing is waterproof, we recommend you sponge bath in the first 7 days after the procedure. After 7 days, your stitches will be removed, and your doctor/nurse will advise if you can shower as normal.

When is the tube taken out?

The tube is designed to stay in position in the body. However, sometimes the fluid drainage from the chest dries up and the tube is no longer needed, it can be removed. You will be asked to come into hospital and the tube will be removed as a day procedure.

Further Information:

Pleural Clinical Nurse Consultant 0428 167 972 or Respiratory Registrar 8405 8000

This information is general only.
Northern Health encourages you to ask questions
and get specific advice from your treating team.

Northern Health



If you need an Interpreter or
the support of an Aboriginal
Liaison Officer, please speak
to a staff member.



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