For us, cancer is personal

Care of your Hickman Catheter
What is a Hickman Catheter?

A Hickman Catheter is a white silicone tube, which allows easy access to your veins.

The catheter is placed under the skin of your chest, into a large vein that leads to your heart. A small incision is made near your collar bone ‘insertion site’ and this is where the Hickman Catheter is threaded into the vein. Part of the catheter is then tunnelled under the skin of the chest, where it comes out of your body. This is known as the ‘exit site’. You may have a few stiches at the ‘insertion’ and ‘exit’ sites. A cuff under the skin near the ‘exit’ site helps to keep your Hickman Catheter in place. You may feel this cuff as a small lump.

A Hickman Catheter may be required for patients undergoing chemotherapy and stem cell transplant to allow for the administration of chemotherapy, blood products and intravenous fluids to facilitate the collection of blood samples.

How do I prepare for insertion of my Hickman Catheter?

You will be given a date and time for the insertion of your catheter. Prior to your appointment, you should have a thorough shower with the antiseptic wash provided. You will not be able to eat or drink for 6 hours prior to the appointment, except for sips of water to keep your mouth moist and to take your routine medication. Please tell us if you are taking aspirin, heparin, Coumadin, Marevan or warfarin tablets.

You will be given an injection prior to the procedure, which is a mild sedative and has an amnesic effect, which is why you may be unable to recall the procedure.

Therefore you are prohibited from driving on the day of the procedure. Please arrange for a family member or friend to drive you home afterwards. If you are unable to arrange alternative transport home the procedure will be delayed or performed without sedation.

Will there be any pain after the procedure?

Most people have no discomfort immediately after the procedure because the local anaesthetic is still working. As this wears off, you may feel some discomfort. This varies from person to person. Please contact your doctor if pain is not relieved by simple analgesia such as paracetamol.

What do I do about the dressing?

On the day of the procedure, the dressings that have been placed over the ‘entry’ and ‘exit’ sites should remain intact. If showering, it is best to cover the site with plastic or cling wrap and secure with tape so that the site remains clean and dry.

On the day after the procedure, an appointment will have been made for you to attend the centre to have your dressings changed. The nurse will assess the sites and will advise you on care of your catheter and further appointments that may be required.

Once your catheter has been in for 7-10 days, it is generally no longer necessary for a dressing to be applied. The sutures can also be removed from the ‘insertion’ site at about this time. Sutures at the exit site are usually not removed until at least 6 weeks after the catheter is inserted.

If you are an inpatient the ward staff will advise you on the appropriate care.

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It is to allow for the administration of chemotherapy, blood products and intravenous fluids to facilitate the collection of blood samples.
How often should my catheter be flushed?
Flushing your catheter must be done routinely to prevent the catheter from clotting.
If your catheter is not being used routinely, an appointment will be made for you in the centre to have it flushed once a week, or you will be trained to flush the catheter yourself.

How do I care for my catheter?

DO
- Secure your catheter to your clothing or necklace to prevent pulling;
- Keep nail polish and other strong chemicals away, as they can damage your line;
- Avoid activities that involve a lot of shoulder movement.

DO NOT
- Use sharp objects around your catheter;
- Submerge your catheter in water, therefore no swimming in pools, and take care when bathing.

What other problems can occur?
While most people continue their daily activities unimpeded by their catheters, problems can develop.

Catheter breakage
While this is rare, the catheter can break, however Hickman catheters can be repaired. Contact your doctor if you are concerned about your catheter.

Air embolism
This may occur if air enters your vein through the catheter. Again, this is rare. If you feel short of breath or develop a cough contact your doctor.

Clotting
A clot may block the flow of fluid through the catheter. To prevent clotting your catheter is flushed regularly with a heparin solution. If you feel resistance when flushing your catheter contact the centre.

Thrombosis
Thrombosis may occur if a clot forms and blocks the flow of blood through the vein in which your catheter is placed. If you experience pain or swelling in your neck, face, chest or arm, or have a feeling of fullness in your face, contact your doctor immediately.

How long does my catheter stay in place?
A Hickman Catheter can remain in place for as long as your doctor feels you need it. If your catheter is working well and free of complications, it is possible for it to remain in use for several years. When your Hickman Catheter is no longer required, an appointment will be made for you in the centre or X-ray for your catheter to be removed.

What can go wrong?
What do I have to watch out for?
Slight bleeding on the dressing is normal. If you notice any fresh bleeding, apply gentle pressure with your hand and/or apply a cold pack to the site. If you have any concerns about the amount of bleeding, contact your doctor. Bruising can occur after the procedure. This more commonly occurs if your blood counts are abnormal.

Infection may also be of concern after the insertion of a Hickman Catheter. Contact your doctor immediately if you notice:
- increasing redness around the areas
- any discharge from the sites
- temperature of 38°C or higher
- pain at the sites not relieved by paracetamol.
If your Hickman Catheter appears to be infected you may be prescribed antibiotics. Occasionally, your catheter may need to be removed.
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Icon Cancer Care locations

**Adelaide**
First Floor, Tennyson Centre
520 South Road
Kurralta Park SA 5037
P 08 8292 2333 | F 08 8292 2287

**South Brisbane**
Level 5, Mater Medical Centre
293 Vulture Street
South Brisbane QLD 4101
P 07 3737 4500 | F 07 3737 4701

**Townsville**
9–13 Bayswater Road
Hyde Park QLD 4812
P 07 4795 7100 | F 07 4795 7101

**Chermside**
Level 1, Chermside Medical Complex
956 Gympie Road, Chermside QLD 4032
P 07 3737 4500 | F 07 3737 4801

**Southport**
Level 9, Premion Place, 39 White Street (Corner Queen and High Streets)
Southport QLD 4215
P 07 5657 6400 | F 07 5657 6401

**Wesley**
Level 1, Wesley Medical Centre
40 Chasely Street
Auchenflower QLD 4066
P 07 3737 4500 | F 07 3737 4601

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This information was current at the time it was published and is intended as a guide only. It is not intended to replace information provided by your doctor or nurses. Each patient is an individual and responses may vary. If you have any questions, please talk to your doctor or clinic nurse.