

Save Your Veins: Care Instructions

Your Care Instructions

Treatment for some diseases means getting access to a blood vessel to give medicine or collect blood. But a lot of needle pricks can be painful and can damage the vein. Venous access devices placed in a vein can reduce pain and prevent damage to the vein. Several kinds of devices are available.

An implanted port is a device that is placed under the skin of your chest or arm. It is made of plastic, stainless steel, or titanium and is about the size of a quarter, but thicker. A thin, flexible tube called a catheter runs from the port into a large vein. A membrane (septum) similar to a pencil eraser is in the center of the port. A needle can pierce the septum to give medicine or collect blood.

A central venous line is a thin, flexible tube placed in a vein in your arm or chest. It is kept in place with a few stitches. The line can put medicine, liquids, or nutrients right into a blood vessel. A central venous line can be used for several months.

A long-term IV (intravenous) line involves a catheter in your arm, neck, or upper chest. It is kept in place with a few stitches. A long-term IV line can be kept in for weeks or even months.

Tell your doctor if you take any blood thinners such as warfarin (Coumadin) or heparin. These medicines can increase the chance of bleeding inside your body when you get one of these devices.

These devices can make it easier for you to get medicine or give blood. But you need to care for them so they do not get infected or blocked.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

How can you care for yourself at home?

- To help prevent infection, you may need to take a shower instead of a bath with a venous access device. You may have to avoid swimming.
- You should clean the area around the device with soap and water at least one time a day.
- You may not be able to do exercises that involve the part of the body with the venous access device. Ask your doctor what activities you can do.
- Some clothes may irritate the venous access device. Do not wear a bra or suspenders that rub against the venous access device.
- Your device will need regular flushing to keep it open. A nurse or other health professional probably will do this for you.



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Current as of: **February 20, 2015**

Content Version: 10.6