A peripherally inserted central catheter (PICC) is a long flexible tube, about the size of a piece of cooked spaghetti. The PICC is placed into a vein in your upper arm and advanced into a larger vein that leads to your heart. A PICC is more secure than a regular IV that is placed in the top of your hand or in your lower arm. A PICC can stay in place for weeks to months rather than days.

Why do I need a PICC?
People have a PICC placed for many reasons:
- poor veins
- medications that are irritating to the veins
- IV (intravenous) nutrition/TPN (total parental nutrition)
- blood products
- chemotherapy
- long term antibiotics
- blood draws

Will a PICC affect my daily activities?
Many people with a PICC can perform their normal daily activities. You may take a walk, ride, shop, and do housework or hobbies depending upon how you feel and your medical condition.

There are some things you should not do. Avoid swimming, lifting weights, and playing contact sports. Do not do activities that involve moving your arm a lot such as vacuuming, and swinging golf clubs or baseball/softball bats.

You may bathe or shower by covering your upper arm and PICC with plastic wrap, such as Saran Wrap® or Press ‘N Seal®. When taking off the plastic wrap, always check your PICC dressing carefully. If you see water or soap under the PICC dressing, call your nurse or doctor right away. Keep the PICC insertion site dry and covered at all times to help prevent infection.
How is the PICC inserted?
The PICC will be inserted in your room by a specially trained nurse or it may be placed by a doctor in the Radiology Department. You will lie on your back with your arm straight out from your side. After the area is cleaned, a needle will be inserted into your vein using ultrasound. After the catheter is in place and secured to your arm, a clear dressing is applied to cover the insertion site. A chest x-ray may be needed to confirm that the line is in the proper position.

Care of your PICC
The PICC dressing will need to be changed:
- once every 7 days for as long as it is in place
- if the dressing becomes loose or soiled

Care of your PICC may be done at an outpatient IV Department or at your doctor’s office. It may also be done at home by a home care agency nurse or by a family member after they have been taught how to do the care properly.

The PICC will need to be flushed as instructed by your home health nurse or doctor. This helps prevent the line from becoming clotted. If the PICC won’t flush or is hard to flush, further treatment is needed.

When using your PICC, never use any syringe smaller than 10ml. Using a smaller syringe will create more pressure inside the PICC and may damage it.

Preventing Infections
Since a PICC goes directly into your bloodstream, it is very important to prevent infections.
- Always scrub the cap on the end of your catheter for 15 seconds with an alcohol swab before using.
- Always keep a cap on your catheter.
- Always make sure the cap and connections are tight.
- Always make sure your dressing is dry and covers the insertion site.
- Never try to reinser the catheter into your arm if the catheter has been partially pulled out.
- If your catheter has clamps on it, always make sure they are clamped when the catheter is not in use.
- Contact your home care nurse or doctor’s office if your PICC will not flush.
- Refer to the booklet that you were given for more information.
Call your doctor or home health nurse if any of these occur:

- Fever above 101°F or chills
- Redness, swelling, drainage, or increased tenderness at the insertion site or in the upper arm
- Leaking around the catheter
- Bleeding around the catheter lasting longer than 24 hours after the catheter was placed
- Any hole or break in the catheter – if this occurs fold the catheter back on itself and tape it to your arm. Call your home care nurse or doctor’s office right away.
- the catheter is hard to flush or will not flush at all
- the catheter gets partially or completely pulled out

If you have any questions or concerns, talk to your nurse or doctor.