

## Caring for Your Catheter

### About Catheters

Just as other medicines can be taken in various forms, the same is true for chemotherapy. People with cancer sometimes require that tubes be placed into their body. This is so that they can receive medications directly into the blood stream through a vein (intravenously). These tubes may be under the skin or outside the skin.

### Types of Catheters

A catheter is a soft, thin tube that a surgeon inserts into a large vein, often in your chest area. Some catheters stay in place until all your chemotherapy treatments are finished. There are a few different types of catheters, but fall under two main categories: sticking out of the skin (external) or under the skin (subcutaneous).

**Out of the skin (external):** One end of a thin, flexible plastic tube is inserted into a large vein. The other end of the tube comes out of the skin. These are sometimes called a PICC line (percutaneously inserted central catheter). Medications are injected into this end of the tube.

**Under the skin (subcutaneous):** A line that is implanted entirely under the skin is usually referred to as a port-a-cath or a medi-port. These lines are usually placed in the chest, but may sometimes be placed in the arm. If you have this type of catheter, it may be connected to a small, round disc made of plastic or metal, called a port, which is also placed under your skin. Your nurse can insert a needle into your port to give you chemotherapy. This needle is often left in place for chemotherapy treatments that last for more than one day.

### Caring for Your Catheter or Port

Your doctor or nurse will provide detailed instructions on how to care for your central venous access device. To lower the chance of developing an infection:

- Follow your nurse or doctor's instructions.
- Keep the device clean and dry and wash your hands before touching or caring for your device.
- Contact your doctor or nurse immediately if you notice any of the following near your device:
  - Redness
  - Swelling
  - Soreness
  - Any drainage (including pus)

Any of these could be the sign of an infection.