

Care of Your Central Venous Access Device (CVAD)

What is a Central Venous Access Device (CVAD)?

A CVAD, also known as a central venous catheter or central line is a long, soft, thin, hollow tube that is used to deliver fluids into a large vein (blood vessel). Some CVADs may be (tunnelled) under the skin and others may be placed in a vein.

Why is a CVAD used?

A CVAD is used to:

- give intravenous medicines over a long period of time such as antibiotics or chemotherapy
- deliver intravenous medication as an outpatient
- take frequent blood samples.

What are the benefits of using a CVAD?

The benefits are:

- to reduce the risk of being admitted to hospital
- to enable the medication to be given without the need for frequent injections
- to enable you to have your treatment at home.

What are the risks of having a CVAD?

There are some risks involved in having a CVAD, these are:

- potential bleeding from around the catheter
- a risk of infection
- blocking of the catheter can result in the health professional being unable to administer medicines
- too much kinking of the catheter may result in the catheter breaking
- a potential risk of developing a clot (thrombosis).

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Originator: Community Nursing Service

Caring for your CVAD

There are things you must do to care for your CVAD and help reduce risk of infection:

- keep your CVAD clean and dry at the exit site where it comes out of your chest, and also at the end where the bung is attached
- try not to get the dressing wet as this can increase the risk of infection.

Once the wound has healed a dressing may no longer be required, however, some patients like to keep a dressing over the exit site.

You or your carer can be taught how to change the dressing. This may help if you prefer a shower between the nurse's visits.

- keep your CVAD secure. It needs to be looped and secured with tape. Your health professional will show you how to do this
- it is not advisable to wear jewellery, necklaces or beads around your neck, as these may catch on your CVAD.

Potential problems

Ring your healthcare professional if any of these things occur:

- redness, pain or swelling or oozing from around the CVAD, where the CVAD enters the skin
- if you feel unwell, such as fever, chills or a temperature
- breathlessness, pain over shoulder across the chest and into the neck and arm.

If the CVAD has moved out of position or breaks - clamp, pinch or tie your catheter immediately above the break. Contact the hospital or clinic who put the catheter in as soon as possible. You may have to return to have it repaired or replaced.

On-going review of your CVAD

Your healthcare professional will assess the site of the CVAD each time you are reviewed or given treatment.

When your treatment is complete the CVAD will be removed by the ward or hospital that inserted your CVAD. The CVAD will not be removed in the community.