

Implanted ports

A guide for patients receiving intravenous therapies via the port-a-cath.

What is an implanted port?

An implanted port ('Port-a-cath') is a device, which is inserted under the skin into your body. The usual position is on the chest. It can be placed on either side of your chest. The port can be felt through the skin.



How is the port inserted?

This involves a day case surgical procedure. The port is inserted by a surgeon and usually takes place under a general anaesthetic. After surgery you'll have 2 small cuts; one small cut on your upper chest and one smaller cut in your neck. A chest x-ray might be done, after surgery, to ensure correct positioning.

How is the port used?

Puncturing the port is similar to pricking the skin with a pin. This shouldn't be painful, but you may feel a pushing sensation. If it is painful, you can apply local anesthetic cream to the area 30 minutes before we insert the needle. Entry to the port is gained by puncturing the port-a-cath with a special type of needle, which is attached to a length of tubing (an extension set). This will allow you to receive fluids and drugs or have blood samples taken from it. After you receive treatment your the needle will be withdrawn.

How do I care for the port?

After each treatment, a small amount of fluid is 'flushed' into the catheter so it doesn't become blocked. Unless told otherwise the port will need to be flushed every 10 days if it isn't being used regularly. It is important not to twiddle the port.

Possible problems with implantable ports

Infection

You should contact your doctor if:

- The area around the port becomes red, swollen or painful
- You develop a high temperature (fever)
- You feel faint, shivery, breathless or dizzy.

If this happens antibiotics may be prescribed.

Clots

It's possible for a clot to form in the vein where the catheter sits. Signs of a clot include swelling, tenderness or redness in the neck


or arm on the same side of the body as the port.
If this happens doctor may prescribe treatment to dissolve the clot.

Blocked line


The inside of the catheter can sometimes become partially or totally blocked (occluded).

If this happens, it can be difficult for treatment to be given or for blood samples to be taken. The catheter may be flushed with a solution to try to clear the blockage, or the port may need to be removed.

Advantages of an implanted port?

- It only needs to have the needle put in when we need to use it.
- The needle is removed in between treatments and you will not have to worry about any dressings or flushing the catheter. 
- It doesn't restrict your normal activities including swimming. However, it's advisable to avoid strenuous exercise for a few weeks after surgery so your body can heal.

Disadvantages of an implanted port?

- You still need to have a needle inserted each time the port is used. The port can sometimes be difficult to access. 
- You will need to go to theatre or other specific department for the insertion and removal, which is carried out under general (or sometimes local) anaesthetic.
- It will leave some scars and if you are worried about scars then discuss this with the surgeon.
- If you need to have blood tests, for example, at your GP, or other hospital you may find that the staff are not trained to take blood from a port.
- It cannot be used for any nuclear medicine test injections and may only be used for CT and MRI scan injection in certain circumstances.

An alternative to this is to use a cannula into a peripheral vein (in the vein of the arm). If you want, you can discuss this with your doctor.

