Humber River Health

Vascular Access Program

Living with an Implanted Venous Access Device (Port-a-Cath™)

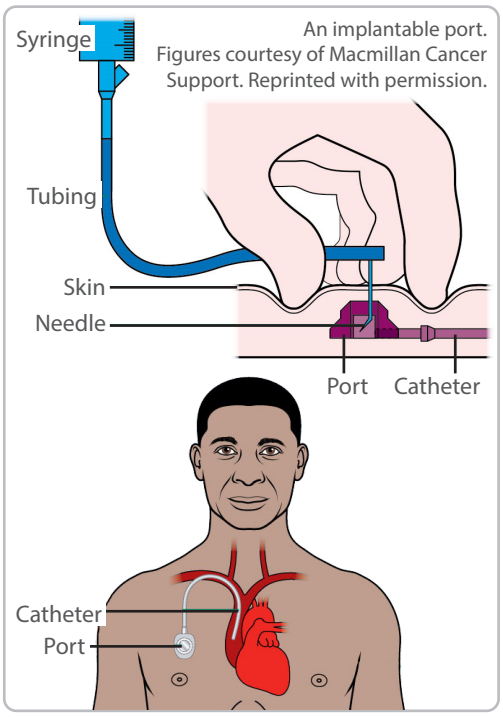
What is an Implanted Venous Access Device (Port-a-Cath™)?

An **implanted venous access device** ("**Port-a-Cath**"), is made up of:

- **A "port" or "resevoir"**, which we have "implanted" under the skin in your chest, and
- **A thin, hollow, flexible tube** (catheter) attached to the port, which we have threaded through the large vein in your chest, stopping near your heart.

We use a needle to inject medicine, solutions and other treatments through the skin into the port. The port allows you to receive these fluids directly into your bloodstream.

There are different types of port-a-caths. Some implanted ports are safe to use for high speed injection during a CT scan or MRI. These ports are called, "power ports". If we have implanted this type of port, we will give you an identification card to let you know.



An implantable port. Figures courtesy of Macmillan Cancer Support. Reprinted with permission.

What are the advantages of a Port?

- Some people like ports because the entire system is under the skin. There is only a small bump visible under the skin over the port.
- When you do not need treatment, caring for it only involves flushing it once a month.
- Active people prefer ports because there are almost no activity restrictions when the port does not have a needle in it. You can swim and carry on your usual activities.

What are the disadvantages of a Port?

- Placing and removing the port involves more work compared to other central lines.
- We need to give you a needle through the skin to access the port every time. Some people do not like the idea of another needle stick. You may ask your doctor about a prescription for numbing cream we can rub on your skin. This can make this needle stick more comfortable.

What complications should I look out for?

Ports are very durable and can last for years. As with other central IV lines, potential problems may occur. The following are the common complications and the signs and symptoms to watch for.

Continued on back of page. Please turn over.

English: This information is important! If you have trouble reading this, ask someone to help you.

Italian: Queste informazoni sono importanti! Se ha difficoltà a leggere questo, chieda aiuto a qualcuno.

Spanish: ¡Esta información es importante! Si tiene dificultad en leer esto, pida que alguien le ayude.

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What complications should I look out for? (continued)

Infection

Germs can get in or around the port, causing an infection. An infection can become a serious problem if not treated promptly.

Contact your doctor or nurse right away if you have any signs of an infection, such as:

- Redness, swelling, warmth, tenderness, or drainage where we have placed the port. You may have a "local infection."
- Signs that there is an infection in your bloodstream, such as:
  - » Fever (temperature above 38°C or 100.4°F)
  - » Chills
  - » Vomiting (throwing up)
  - » Diarrhea (loose, watery stool)
  - » Fatigue (feeling tired)
  - » Weakness
  - » Loss of appetite.

Tip Movement

It is possible that the tip (the deepest portion) of your port can change position in your body. This can happen if you have excessive vomiting, coughing, sneezing, hiccupping, or vigorous arm movement.

Contact your doctor or nurse right away if:

- You feel pain, discomfort, or soreness in the shoulder, jaw, ear, or neck
- You feel coldness or fullness in the area
- You hear flushing or have pain when you use your port.

Breakage

Internal catheter breaks are very rare. When they do occur, we will need to remove and replace the catheter.

Contact your doctor or nurse right away if:

- You notice your catheter is not working correctly
- You have some swelling or pain around the site of the port
- Your heart rate is a little faster or beating irregularly
- You feel short of breath for no obvious reason.

Blockage of the Port

If your port is blocked, you will not be able to flush, infuse medicines, or draw blood from the port. This may mean that the medicines are not reaching the proper place. Blood clots in the port itself or in the vein around the port is a common cause of a blocked port. Clots can plug up the catheter, making infusions difficult.

Contact your doctor or nurse right away if:

- You notice a problem with your infusion.
- Your pump continues to alarm.

If you have questions or problems with your port, contact:

HCCSS Case Manager: _____

Your Doctor: _____

Vascular Access Team (7:30 am to 11:30 pm): _____

Or contact the team through locating at (416) 242-1000

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