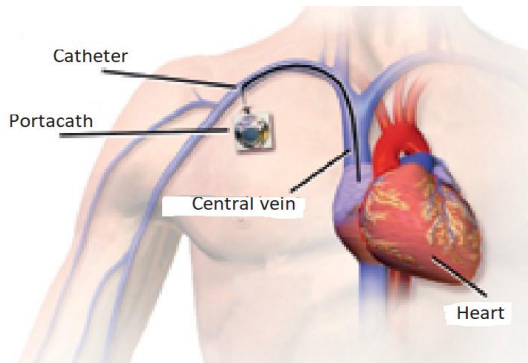


The portacath, or a central venous catheter with an implanted reservoir

A portacath is a small medical device which consists of a silicon catheter that is inserted surgically into the central vein and a titanium chamber which is inserted under the skin of the chest (see figure). The portacath is usually inserted in the area around the clavicle.

Once inserted, a portacath is practically unnoticeable and enables the patient to lead a normal life.



What a portacath is inserted for

A portacath is usually inserted for carrying out long-term intravenous treatments (primarily chemotherapy) or frequent transfusions of blood products. It is also possible to collect blood samples through the portacath.

A portacath is normally inserted for up to three years, or for a time period specified by the treating physician. Decisions regarding the necessity of the portacath and the time of its removal are made by the treating physician. Prior to the procedure, the patient is asked for their written consent to have the portacath inserted.

What you need to know before your portacath insertion

- Let your doctor know about all medications that you are taking, especially if you are taking blood thinners.
- You will be given an appointment for the portacath insertion. You should come to the hospital on the morning of the day of the procedure (unless your doctor instructs you otherwise).
- The doctor or nurse-counsellor will determine which blood tests you need to have done prior to the procedure and prepare you for the procedure.
- To reduce the risk of infection, you should shower and wash your hair in the evening before the procedure.
- The procedure will be carried out under local or general anaesthesia.
- You must not eat for at least 6 hours and not drink for at least 4 hours prior to the procedure.
- Refrain from smoking for at least 3 hours before the procedure! Smoking causes the blood vessels to become constricted.
- Remove jewellery and dentures before having the procedure. Leave any valuables at home if possible.

Portacath insertion

- The portacath insertion will be carried out in the operating room by a physician anaesthesiologist.
- The duration of the procedure is 30 minutes to 1 hour.
- To insert the portacath, an incision will be made into the skin and the wound will be sealed with a special patch.
- After insertion, the portacath can be used at once or as needed, according to your doctor's instructions.
- To use the portacath, a special needle (a Huber-needle) is inserted into the portacath chamber. If it is necessary to begin treatment immediately after the insertion of the portacath, the needle will also be inserted in the operating room.
- After you have undergone a portacath insertion, make sure that your personal portacath passport has been given to you. The passport will be issued by a day surgery ward nurse.

What you need to know after the portacath insertion

- Due to impaired reactivity, you must not drive or operate machinery for 24 hours after undergoing anaesthesia. Ask someone to pick you up from the hospital so that you arrive at home safely.
- After the procedure, you may experience pain in the area where the portacath was inserted. Take pain relief according to your doctor's instructions, as necessary.
- You may notice mild swelling or bruising in the area where the portacath was inserted. These will usually subside in a few days.
- The portacath needle must be changed every 7 days. For specific treatments (e.g. therapeutic food products, transfusions), the current regulations are followed.
- If a treatment is carried out immediately after the insertion of the portacath, the needle is removed after the treatment is completed.
- After the portacath needle is removed, the needle insertion site is covered with a sterile plaster. You may remove the plaster at home.

Portacath wound care

Like all surgical wounds, the portacath insertion wound also requires care.

- During your hospital stay, your nurse will care for the wound and change the patch if it is damp, dirty, or has become unglued. Let the nurse know at once if you feel any discomfort, swelling, or disturbing pain in the area where the portacath was inserted.
- Once at home, you should monitor the state of the patch yourself and change it if it becomes dirty or damp.
- Your family nurse, home nurse, or chemotherapy nurse will care for the wound and remove the adhesive patches in 7–10 days. Antibacterial ointments, creams, gels, or brilliant green must not be used in the area around the portacath.
- You may wash the skin in the area where the portacath was inserted after the adhesive patches are removed. You may go to the sauna once the skin has completely healed. Avoid going to the steam room if it's hot. You may go to the swimming pool one month after the procedure.

Contact your chemotherapy nurse-counsellor, your treating physician, or your family physician/family nurse immediately if:

- Swelling, reddening, or pain develops around the portacath wound;
- You experience shortness of breath, dizziness, or elevated body temperature.

If you are unable to contact nurses or doctors, you should go to the nearest hospital emergency room.

Regular flushing of the portacath

- The portacath requires regular flushing between treatments and after a treatment has been completed.
- Flushing will prevent the catheter from becoming obstructed and ensure that it stays functional for longer.
- The portacath will be flushed by a trained nurse after three to four weeks.
- Please always make sure to schedule the next appointment for flushing the portacath with your nurse.

Always have your portacath passport with you! We recommend keeping it in your wallet or with other documents that you carry with you (e.g. your ID-card).

Always inform the healthcare workers that you have a portacath when being admitted to a hospital or going in for a procedure.

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