What to Expect When Getting a Port-a-Cath

Information for patients and families

Read this information to learn:

• what a Port-a-Cath is
• what to expect
• how to care for it
• who to call if you have any questions
What is a Port-a-Cath?

A Port-a-Cath (also called a port) is a device placed under the skin in your chest. It has a thin flexible tube that is put into a large blood vessel leading to your heart.

Why do I need to have a Port-a-Cath?

Your doctor or nurse may use a Port-a-Cath if you have small or weak veins. Some intravenous fluids and medicines can be harmful if given through smaller veins, like the ones in your hands and arms.

A Port-a-Cath will make it easier and safer to give you intravenous fluids and medicines. We can also use the port to draw blood. Having the port means we won’t have to poke your arm veins many times.
How do I prepare for the procedure?

The port will be inserted (put in) in the radiology department. You will be awake during the procedure. To prepare:

- Some medicines may increase your risk of bleeding during or after your procedure. Tell your doctor or health care provider if you are taking:
  - medicines such as acetylsalicylic acid (Aspirin®), clopidogrel (Plavix®), prasugrel (Effient®), ticagrelor (Brillinta®), ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®, Nuprin®), naproxen (Naprosyn®) or indomethacin
  - medicines such as warfarin (Coumadin®), dalteparin (Fragmin®), enoxaparin (Lovenox®), tinzaparin (Innohep®), fondaparinux (Arixtra®), dabigatran (Pradaxa®), rivaroxaban (Xarelto®) or apixaban (Eliquis®)

Your doctor or health care provider may tell you to stop taking these medicines for a certain number of days before your procedure.

- Your blood work must be completed at least 3 days before your procedure. The results must be available to your health care team 2 to 3 days before your procedure. Your doctor or nurse will give you instructions about this.

- A few days before, arrange for a family member or friend to drive you home after the procedure.

- Don’t eat and drink anything after midnight before your procedure.
  
  You may take sips of water for your regular medicine.

What should I bring on the day of the procedure?

On the day of your procedure, remember to bring:

- your health (OHIP) card
- a list of the regular medicines you are taking
Where do I go to have my Port-a-Cath inserted?

If your procedure is at Toronto Western Hospital, check-in at:

Medical Imaging Reception
East Wing – 3rd floor
399 Bathurst Street
Toronto, Ontario, M5T 2S8

If your procedure is at Toronto General Hospital, check-in at:

Medical Imaging Reception
Peter Munk Building – 1st floor
585 University Avenue
Toronto, Ontario, M5G 2C4

Arrive at the hospital 30 minutes before your appointment time. Expect to stay about 2 hours.

What can I expect during the procedure?

1. We will ask you to change into a patient gown.
2. A nurse will assess (check) you, give you an Intravenous (IV) and ask you about your medical history.
3. We will take you to the procedure room and ask you to lie down on a table. A nurse will sedate you and give you pain medicine through the IV.
4. During the whole procedure, the nurse will check your oxygen levels, blood pressure, and heart rate.
5. The doctor will use a needle to give you a local anesthetic in your chest area. This will help numb the area where the Port-a-Cath goes in.
6. The doctor will make a small incision (cut) to insert the port and the tube.
7. After the Port-a-Cath is inserted, an x-ray will be taken to make sure the port and tube are in the right place.
8. A dressing (covering) will be put over the area where the port was inserted.
9. A nurse will monitor you until you are ready to be discharged home. A friend or family member **must** take you home from hospital.

**What can I do when I get home?**

- Spend the rest of the day resting at home. You can eat and drink normally.
- You may have some mild pain or cramps. This is normal. You can take acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or other non-aspirin pain medicine if you need to. Your doctor may give you a prescription for pain medicine.
- Protect the skin over your port. Don’t wear tight bras, suspenders, or carry a purse or bag across your chest.

**What should I do with the dressing and stitches?**

- You can remove the dressing 2 days after your procedure. You may shower or bathe after the dressing has been removed.
- Your stitches will dissolve and disappear on their own over time.
- Don’t peel off the Steri-strips (white tape) under the dressing. They will fall off on their own.
Call your doctor or nurse right away if you have:

- a fever, with or without chills
- shortness of breath with or without dizziness
- chest pain
- pain, swelling, redness or drainage (fluid) around your incision (cut)
- swelling on your neck, face, or arm on the side where the port is inserted
- any fresh (bright red) bleeding coming through your dressing or after you remove the dressing

These may be signs of infection or other problems.

Go to your local emergency room if you have a problem that needs to be looked at right away.

We will give you a card that tells you what kind of Port-a-Cath you have. Please keep this card with you. You may be asked to show it when you come to the hospital.

Who should I call if I have questions after my procedure?

If your Port-a-Cath was inserted at Toronto General Hospital:
📞 416 340 4800, extension 5403
Monday to Friday from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm

If your Port-a-Cath was inserted at Toronto Western Hospital:
📞 416 603 5800, extension 6301
Monday to Friday from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm
If you are a patient of **Princess Margaret Cancer Centre**:  
☎ 416 946 2000, Monday to Friday from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. Ask for:

Doctor: __________________________ or 

RN case manager: __________________________

At any other time, call 416 946 2000 and ask for the Nursing Administration Coordinator.

**What other things should I know about my Port-a-Cath?**

- It will stay in place as long as you need it.
- It will not affect medical tests like CT scans, x-rays or MRIs. If you need one of these tests, you can still have it.
- Your Port-a-Cath will need to be flushed at least once a month with an appropriate solution (for example, normal saline and heparin). Your doctor or nurse will let you know where you can go to have your port flushed, or if home care has been arranged.
- After all your treatments are complete, ask your doctor when you can have your Port-a-Cath removed.

**Where do I go for blood work?**

After your Port-a-Cath is put in, all your blood work will be drawn through the port.

**For Outpatient Princess Margaret:**
Go to the Ambulance Waiting Area on the main floor (back elevator) to have your blood drawn.

**For Toronto General Hospital, Toronto Western Hospital, and Toronto Rehabilitation Institute:**
Your doctor or nurse will let you know where you can go to have your blood drawn from your port.