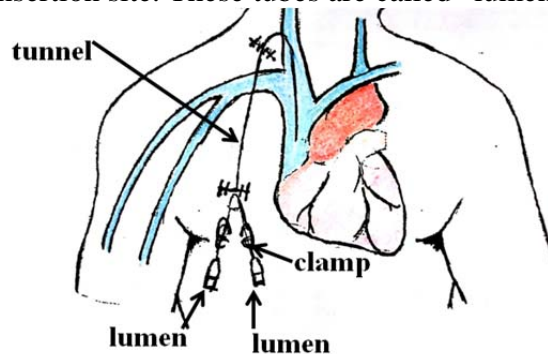


**NIH Clinical Center Patient Education Materials**  
**Interventional Radiology and Procedure, Vascular Access, Conscious Sedation**  
**Service:**  
**Tunneled Central Catheter**

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**What is a tunneled central catheter?**

A tunneled central catheter is a thin, soft tube a doctor inserts under the skin of your chest and threads into the vein leading into your heart. It is a way to take blood samples or give you fluids, medicine, or nutrients. Depending on your treatment needs and type of catheters, the catheter may have one, two, or three tubes hanging from the insertion site. These tubes are called “lumens.”



2016, Illustrated by IckHo Kim, R.N.

**How will I get a catheter?**

A specially-trained doctor will put the catheter into your body and will:

- Arrange for you to receive anesthesia for the catheter insertion procedure.
- Make two small cuts in the skin. One near your neck, and another on your chest.
- Guide the catheter through the lower cut, under your skin, and up to the cut near your neck.
- Place the tip of the catheter into a vein in your neck and guide it until the catheter is near your heart.
- Use stitches to hold the catheter in place and cover it with dressing. These stitches will be removed as soon as the skin heals.

**Immediately after the procedure:**

- After your tunneled catheter is done, you may have 1 or 2 small dressings placed over the site.
- You will be returned to your room or outpatient clinic.
- If you have stitches at your catheter insertion site (near your collarbone), they will be removed in about 10 to 14 days.

The stitches where the catheter comes out will be removed in about 6 weeks if you still have the catheter. Your clinic or patient care area nurse will show you how to take care of your tunneled catheter. Some doctors may use “super glue” instead of stitches. The glue will slowly fall off your skin as it heals.

- You received your tunneled central catheter on (date): \_\_\_\_\_
  - We took x-rays to confirm your catheter’s location, and the catheter is ready to go
  - The medication(s) you received for your procedure are:
-

**After the procedure:**

- Do not shower or bathe for 24 hours.
  - The catheter site **must** be kept dry as long as you keep the catheter.
  - After 24 hours if you shower or bathe, the area must be securely covered and kept dry (with a water-proof dressing).
  - You may expect some discomfort at the site.
  - Your catheter dressing needs to be changed within a few days.
- Neck stitches removed (date): \_\_\_\_\_
- Catheter stitches removed (date): \_\_\_\_\_

**Special instructions:**

Please call your clinic doctor if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Temperature or chills as directed by your clinic (often 38.5 degrees C or 101 degrees F)
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Redness, swelling, excessive bleeding, or draining at the catheter site
- Unrelieved or increasing pain at the catheter site
- Swelling, burning, or severe pain in the arm, shoulder or neck on the side where the catheter was placed
- If you have any routine questions or concerns, contact your clinic doctor or nurse.

**How do I take care of my catheter?**

While you are in the hospital, your nurse will take care of your catheter.

- A sterile dressing change will be performed by your nurse once a week.
- Your catheter will be flushed with sterile solution after every use. If it is not being used, it still must be flushed once a week.
- Depending on your treatment plan, you may need to flush your catheter yourself when you go home. If you do, your nurse may schedule you to take a class that teaches how to care for your catheter. When you take this class, you will learn how to:
  - Flush your catheter after each use.
  - Change the dressing and caps on the lumens once a week.
  - Always carry the smooth-edged clamp your nurse gave you.
  - Recognize and solve possible problems with your catheter.

**Can I keep doing my everyday activities?**

You can keep up with most of your everyday activities like going to work or school, exercise, and sexual activity. To keep yourself safe, you will need to make a few changes:

Exercise: Most exercise is safe, but avoid contact sports (like football or basketball), lifting weights, and swimming.

**Can I shower or bathe?**

Yes, but make sure to:

- Place a water-tight cover over the dressing and catheter.
- Keep the catheter out of the water at all times.
- Change the dressing right away if the catheter or dressing gets wet.

**Can I go swimming?**

For at least a month after you get the catheter, you cannot go swimming. After you have had your catheter for at least a month, then ask your doctor if it is safe for you to go swimming. If your doctor says that it is safe for you to go swimming, then make sure you:

- Swim only in pools treated with chlorine.
- Check that the pool's chlorine level is tested regularly.
- Place a water-tight cover over the catheter's dressing and the catheter.
- Change the dressing right away if it gets wet.

Even if you are allowed to swim, do not get into hot tubs, and do not swim in lakes, rivers, or oceans.

- Other things to remember while you have your catheter:
  - Never use scissors near your catheter.
  - Keep the smooth-edged clamp provided to you with you at all times.

If you are not sure whether an activity is safe, ask your doctor or nurse.

### **What if I have problems with my catheter?**

Some problems are more serious than others. Know what to do in any of the following situations:

Call your doctor as soon as you can if:

Your catheter looks longer than usual.

One of the lumens cannot be flushed. Never try to force liquid into the lumen.

Speak with your doctor right away if:

Your catheter leaks or the dressing gets wet when you flush it. It could be broken. While you wait to talk to your doctor, place your clamp where the catheter enters the skin.

The area near your catheter is bleeding. A small amount of bleeding in the first 24 hours is normal.

While you wait to talk to your doctor:

Do not remove the dressing.

Apply firm pressure over the dressing with your hand.

The area around your catheter gets red, swollen, and/or painful.

You have swelling or a feeling of fullness in your arm, chest, neck, or face on the same side as your catheter.

You have a temperature greater than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit, or you have chills/shakes or just feel awful like you're getting the flu.

### **Call 911 for emergency help if you suddenly have shortness of breath, trouble breathing, chest pain, heavy bleeding from your catheter exit site or if it falls out.**

While you wait for help after calling 911, you or someone helping you should:

If bleeding, apply firm pressure over the site

Make sure the clamps on all of the lumens are closed.

Make sure the caps on the lumens are on tight.

Lie down on your left side until help arrives.

### **If you have any other questions about your catheter:**

Call the VAD Consult Service at 301-451-0336, Monday through Friday, 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Outside of these times, you can page a VAD nurse by calling the NIH page operator at 301-496-1211.

Ask the operator to contact the on-call VAD nurse for you.

## Information about my catheter

**Insertion Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Catheter Type:**      Valved      Non-valved

**Insertion Site:** Left                  Right

Subclavian (chest)

**Size/ Gauge:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Power Injectable:**    Yes                  No

**Lumens:**     Single                  Double                  Triple

**External Length:** \_\_\_\_\_