

# Insertion and care of your cannula

## Information for patients



### What is a cannula?

A cannula is a soft hollow tube. Using a needle attached to the end, a cannula can be inserted by a trained nurse, doctor or practitioner into a vein, usually in your forearm. This is called a **peripheral cannula**.

### Why do I need a peripheral cannula?

A peripheral cannula can be used to deliver fluid, blood or medication that is required as part of your care and treatment.

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## What are the risks of the procedure?

As with any invasive procedure there are risks with the insertion of a peripheral cannula. The most important risks to be aware of are:

- **Infection:** there is a risk of infection around the entry point of your cannula into the skin. To help avoid infection:
  - The cannula must remain **covered** at all times with a clear sterile dressing.
  - The cannula must be kept **dry**.
  - If you see **redness or swelling** at the entry point, or there is **pain** when fluid or medication is put through, this may indicate infection (this must be dealt with promptly, so please tell us).
  - The cannula should not remain in for longer than **72 hours**, unless reviewed by a member of the medical team and assessed at least every 8 hours by the nursing staff.

If you have a raised **temperature** you must seek advice promptly.

- **Thrombus** (clot): this is very rare from a cannula and is resolved by removing the cannula.
  - **Numbness, pins and needles:** this is rare from a cannula insertion; if you feel these symptoms tell the staff caring for you immediately.
  - **Difficult access:** everyone's veins are different, there are a number of reasons why the insertion of a cannula is not always successful, for example:
    - The young and the elderly often have small fragile veins.
    - Certain medications can constrict blood vessels, making insertion difficult.
    - Your general health at the time of insertion. Difficulties may arise if you are very unwell, or are overweight, or are on blood thinning medication e.g. **warfarin**.
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- If you have low blood pressure.
  - If you have had previous multiple insertions of cannula.
  - If you are very anxious – if you find this procedure stressful tell your practitioner and they can offer support.
  - **Bruising:** occasionally there is bruising following an attempt at insertion, particularly if you have fragile veins; this will fade over time. If you are concerned please speak to a member of staff who is caring for you.
    - Tell the member of staff inserting the cannula if you are on blood thinning medication e.g. **warfarin**.
  - Occasionally it may not be possible to insert a cannula; if this is the case, an alternative will be discussed with you.

### Before the procedure

- Let us know if you are **anxious** - we can help you with this.
- You can eat and drink normally before insertion, unless instructed not to.

### What happens during the procedure?

You will have the procedure explained to you by a member of staff. However, the following points may be helpful:

- You will be asked to give verbal consent, unless in an emergency situation.
  - Your cannula will be inserted in a clean environment.
  - The practitioner will clean their hands and wear gloves and a plastic apron.
  - A disposable tourniquet will be placed around your arm to help identify the most suitable vein.
  - Your skin will be cleansed and allowed to dry; the practitioner will then insert the cannula.
  - You may feel some discomfort during insertion but once the cannula is in place any discomfort should go.
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- A clear sterile dressing will be applied and small tubes will be attached to the end of the cannula.
  - The cannula will be checked for correct placement.
  - A sticker stating when your cannula will need review will be placed on the outside of your cannula dressing.
  - You should feel no discomfort or pain when medication or fluid is given into your cannula.

### Restrictions when you have a cannula in place

- **Do not** adjust any part of your dressing or cannula.
- You must not get the cannula site **wet**.
- If your cannula is **accidentally removed**, apply pressure to the site and inform a member of staff immediately.

### What if there's a problem?

- Staff who are caring for you in hospital will observe your cannula for problems and remove the cannula if indicated.
- You should not have any further problems once your cannula has been removed.

If you are concerned about the area where your cannula was inserted, for example if you have **redness, pain, temperature** or **swelling**, please contact the staff that have been caring for you



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## Further information and advice

If you need further advice please speak to the Ward Manager or Nurse-in-Charge. They should be able to assist or will ask the Infection Prevention Team for advice.

Alternatively you can call the:

Vascular Access Specialist Practitioner  07713 707608  
 07592 120722



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Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust welcomes all forms of feedback from our service users. If the standard of service you have received from the Trust does not meet your expectations, we want to hear from you. Please speak with the ward manager or the nurse in charge in the first instance, or you can contact the **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)** on:

**Telephone:** ☎ 01622 224960 or ☎ 01892 632953

**Email:** [mtw-tr.palsoffice@nhs.net](mailto:mtw-tr.palsoffice@nhs.net)

**or visit their office** at either Maidstone or Tunbridge Wells Hospital between 9.00am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

You can be confident that your care will not be affected by highlighting any areas of concern or making a complaint. The Trust will retain a record of your contact, which is held separately to any medical records. If you are acting on behalf of a patient, we may need to obtain the patient's consent in order to protect patient confidentiality. More information on PALS or making a complaint can be found on the Trust's website: [www.mtw.nhs.uk](http://www.mtw.nhs.uk) or pick up a leaflet from main reception.

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