



**Northumbria Healthcare**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Cannula care

## Some of your questions answered

Issued by the Vascular Access Team

## What is a cannula?

A cannula is a small flexible plastic tube that is inserted through the skin into one of your veins.

The key purpose of having a cannula is to allow you to have medication or fluids given directly into your veins.

## What happens when I have a cannula inserted?

You may have a cannula inserted as part of your medical treatment this can be at home, or in a healthcare setting.

- A doctor or other specially trained healthcare professional will insert your cannula
- A suitable vein will be selected, ideally away from a joint e.g. wrist or elbow, but this is not always possible
- The nurse or doctor will clean their hands and wear gloves
- The skin at the insertion site will be cleaned with an alcohol based product
- The vein should not be touched once cleaned unless sterile gloves are worn
- For a short time a tight strap will be put around your arm to make the veins stand out
- If your veins are very small, placing your arm in warm water may help
- Once inserted the cannula will be injected with sterile salty water to check that it works
- Whilst the cannula is in place the site will be covered and secured by a transparent dressing

## What are the potential risks?

**Infection:** the procedure is carried out using an aseptic technique but there are still risks of the cannula becoming infected – this may be local infection on the skin or a more general bloodstream infection. If there are signs of infection, the cannula will usually require removal and the infection treated with antibiotics if required.

**Local bruising or pain at the site of insertion:** this usually settles within a few days.

**Failure to insert:** the veins in the arm are sometimes very small and it may not be possible to place the cannula in the correct position on the first attempt. In this instance a further attempt to insert the cannula will be necessary.

## Cannula care

- Ideally the cannula dressing should not get wet. It must remain dry to prevent infection. During bathing, you should try to avoid getting the cannula wet
- The arm with the cannula may be used as usual; this will increase blood circulation in that arm which helps medication to spread throughout the body. However, strenuous work, lifting objects greater than ten pounds, or repetitive motion should all be avoided
- Try not to touch the cannula
- Do not pull the cannula or any drips that may be attached to it
- Take care when changing clothing
- Report any redness, pain or swelling to your nurse or doctor immediately
- Hands must be cleaned and gloves worn when giving injections
- The self sealing bung at the end of the cannula must be cleaned before injections

## Hand hygiene

All clinical staff must wash their hands before handling the cannula.

## Dressing changes

Your nurse will check the dressing when they give you your medication and will change it if it is wet, or marked.

If you notice the dressing is wet, or marked please inform your nurse immediately.

## Flushing the cannula

The catheter must be flushed with salty water (saline) before and after each use. This is required to prevent the tube becoming blocked. This will be carried out by your nurse at the same time as they give you your medication.

## Removal of the cannula

Once the cannula is no longer required it will be removed by a nurse or doctor. The dressing will be taken off and the cannula will be removed. This is usually carried out without any problem.

Once your cannula has been removed there is a small risk of an infection developing around the area where the cannula was located. You can reduce this risk by keeping the area clean.

If you notice any redness, pain and swelling following the removal of the cannula inform your ward doctor or nurse or your GP if you are at home.

This is most common within the first 48 hours after the cannula is removed.

If your cannula was inserted in hospital it must be removed before you go home unless you are informed otherwise by a doctor or nurse. If you are discharged home with your cannula in place you should contact the ward or your district nurse for advice.

## **Contacts**

**If you require any further information or need to speak to someone please contact the ward or department that you have been discharged from, via the switchboard on telephone number 0344 311 3111.**

# Notes

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## **Alternative Formats**

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on **03 44 811 8118**

## **Other sources of information**

### **NHS 111**

### **NHS Choices**

[www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx)

### **NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)**

[www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)

### **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

Freephone: **0800 032 0202**

Text: 01670 511098

Email: [northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk](mailto:northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk)

### **Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust**

General Enquiries **03 44 811 8111**

[www.northumbria.nhs.uk](http://www.northumbria.nhs.uk)

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