

**Q. What can be done to reduce the chance that I'll develop an infection from my IV line?**

**A:** Prevention and early detection are the best ways to catch an infection before it spreads to your bloodstream. It's very important to keep the IV site clean and free from germs. When your IV line is being cleaned or replaced, make sure your nurse always washes his or her hands and wears gloves. It's not uncommon for doctors and nurses to remove a clean IV line from a sterile pack only to place it on a dirty tray! Make sure that your skin is always wiped with an antiseptic before the IV needle is inserted. Your doctor may also decide to put you on antibiotics to help you fight any germs that might get into your bloodstream.

**Q. What are some signs that I may have developed an infection around my IV line?**

**A:** Check your skin for any redness or swelling around the site of the IV line. If there's redness or swelling it could indicate an infection or it could mean your IV line has come loose or needs to be cleaned or changed. If your IV line comes loose, the fluid could be going into your tissue and not into your vein. This situation should be corrected immediately.

## It's a Fact!

Intravenous lines are used extensively in a hospital setting....IV's are used to deliver medications, fluids or nutritional mixtures....IV's are usually kept in place for short periods of time.....Your chances of developing an infection can be reduced if your skin is always wiped with an antiseptic before the IV needle is inserted...Keeping IV lines in a sterile condition until inserted also cuts down on your chances of developing an infection.

Protect Yourself

## What To Do Before.....A Consumer's Guide to Intravenous Lines



## Q. What are Intravenous Lines (IV's)?

**A:** Intravenous lines or IV's are soft, flexible tubes, with a needle at one end, that are used to connect you to medications, fluids, or nutritional mixtures. One end of the line is connected to the bottle or bag of medication and the needle end is inserted into one of your veins. IV's are usually left in place for just a few days or they may be kept in place for longer periods of time.

## Q. Why are IV lines used?

**A:** IV lines are used to deliver medications (antibiotics for example) on a continuous basis or may be used to provide nourishment (usually glucose or sugar water) if you are unable to eat solid foods. IV's are also used to take blood samples so you won't need to have your veins punctured every time a sample is needed. Some IV lines are arranged so multiple medications may be delivered through one line.

## Q. How are IV's inserted?

**A:** Before the IV line is inserted, your skin is cleaned with an antiseptic agent that kills germs. You don't want an infection starting around the site where the IV is placed. Then a rubber tube called a tourniquet is placed around your upper arm and drawn tight. The end of the IV line with the needle is then inserted through your skin and into a vein, usually in your forearm but they may be inserted into a vein in your hand. After the needle is inserted, the needle is then removed, leaving a small plastic tube or catheter in the vein, the tourniquet is released and your blood once again flows this time carrying the medication or fluid that is being delivered through the IV line.



## Q. Why am I likely to develop an infection when I'm on an IV line?

**A:** Any device that breaks your skin is an open highway to germs in the area. They see the IV line as an open invitation to move right in! Intravenous lines may also cause inflammation of the vein and pain at the insertion site, or may become dislodged and leak fluid under the skin. This becomes a prime site where infections can begin. Ask your nurse to check your IV line if you notice pain, swelling, leakage or if the dressing becomes loose, wet or dirty. It's always best to call attention to problems early instead of waiting until you're in real trouble. In some cases the IV may need to be removed and reinserted into a different vein.