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MR0024462 RHC GCU Patient Information - How to look after your Drip (IV Cannula) DL 0221

How to look after your drip (IV Cannula)

Patient Information



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How to look after your drip (IV cannula)

What is an IV (intravenous) cannula or drip and what is it for?

This is a cannula or very thin flexible clear tube that is inserted into a vein usually in the arm or hand that can have a valve or cap fitted to the end of it to allow a health care worker to collect blood samples, administer medications or fluids. Putting the cannula in to the vein is like having a blood test and might be uncomfortable when being put into the vein. When in place, it can also be connected by an IV line (thin tubing from your cannula to an IV fluid bag) if continuous fluids or a larger volume of fluid or medication needs to be given to you over time.

What will it look like?

The cannula insertion site (where the drip goes into your skin and then into the vein) will be taped to your arm or hand to secure it from falling out and covered by a clear waterproof dressing material. If the cannula insertion site is near a joint, you may also need a splint to protect the cannula and minimise movement and damage. There will be a sticker attached to the dressing that will include the date of insertion and may also include the date it is due to be changed.



Who will look after my drip (IV cannula)?

Your doctor or nurse will look after your drip for you, and it will be checked at least once a day (and each shift if in hospital) and before any medication or fluid is administered whilst the drip is in vein.

When checking your IV cannula, IV dressing, valve or cap, IV line or IV fluid bag, all healthcare workers will:

- Clean their hands – with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water before touching the IV cannula (drip) and any IV line or fluid bag
- Check the dressing to see that it is undamaged, and the cannula is correctly in place in the vein
- Check the IV line and fluid bag to confirm the volume and fluid type to be administered is correct. If there is an IV pump attached to the IV line, this will also be checked to confirm it is operating correctly
- Check the IV site to make sure it is clean and dry and not wet or bleeding
- Change the IV cannula and dressing when it is due to be changed or before if necessary
- If the IV line and fluid bag are not needed but the cannula is to remain in the vein the cannula needs to be fitted with a valve or cap to reduce the risk of infection
- If the IV line and fluid bag are disconnected intermittently (e.g. to allow the patient to shower) the line should be capped and secured so it does not fall to the floor
- Remove your IV cannula when it is no longer needed, or your treatment is finished

Normally your drip will be removed before you are discharged from hospital, unless your doctor has ordered it to be left in after you have left the hospital for ongoing treatment or medications

What should I do?

Look after your IV cannula

- Avoid knocking it or catching it on clothing or jewellery
- avoid activities that may allow the cannula to disconnect from the cap, bung or IV tubing as this can increase the risk of infection
- keep it dry – cover with a plastic bag when showering, if washing hands, take care not to wet the dressing

Tell your doctor or nurse immediately if:

- you are worried about the cannula or IV line
- a cap or bung falls out or the IV line becomes disconnected
- there is pain at cannula site (where the drip enters the skin) or during administration of fluids or medication
- if you have a temperature or feel feverish, hot, have chills or feel cold or shivery
- if your arm or hand gets red or swollen
- the cannula insertion site or any connections are leaking or bleeding

You should not:

- remove the dressing covering your IV or cannula site
- touch your IV cannula
- remove or adjust the cap or bung
- disconnect or remove the IV line (if one is being used)
- disconnect or remove the IV fluid bag (if one is being used)

After the cannula is removed, the site where it entered the skin will be covered by a Band-Aid or gauze square and tape to reduce the risk of any infection. Check it daily for 2-3 days for any signs of infection i.e. pain, swelling, redness, ooze. If this happens tell your doctor or nurse immediately.

If you need any more information – please ask your doctor or nurse.