What Is a Tunneled Venous Catheter?
A tunneled venous catheter is a long, hollow, flexible tube inserted (tunneled) under the skin of your chest into a vein. The tip of the tube sits in a large vein just above the heart.

The catheter may have two or three lumens (separate tubes that branch out from the main catheter). Each tube has a clamp to keep it closed when it is not being used.

Why Do I Need a Tunneled Venous Catheter?
The catheter is used to give treatments such as antibiotics, high-calorie liquids, chemotherapy, and blood transfusions.

How Is the Catheter Put In Place?
Your catheter will be placed by your health care team. First, they clean and numb the area of your chest where the catheter will be put in. Next, they make a small cut in the skin near your collarbone, and the tip of the tube is threaded into a large vein. This is called the insertion site. Lastly, they insert the tube under the skin until it reaches the exit site (where the tube comes out of your body). Once in place, the catheter can be left in for weeks or months.

What Stops the Catheter from Falling Out?
Normally, stitches at the exit site secure the line until the skin around the cuff heals. (The cuff is around the line and can be felt under the skin just above the exit site.) You will have the stitches removed 10 days after your catheter is placed.

How Can I Prevent an Infection In My Catheter?
- Make sure your hands are clean before touching your catheter. You can use soap and warm water or an alcohol-based hand gel.
- Be sure anyone who touches the catheter cleans his or her hands.
- BEFORE every use of the injection port, vigorously clean it for 15 seconds with an alcohol wipe.
- Follow the proper guidelines to care for your tunneled venous catheter.

How Do I Care for My Catheter?
Bathing: You may shower with your tunneled venous catheter in place. Wrap the site with plastic wrap and tape to keep it from getting wet when you shower. NEVER allow the catheter insertion site to be submerged under water.

Flushing Your Catheter
Follow these steps to flush your catheter:
1. Wash your hands with soap and warm water.
2. BEFORE every use of the injection port, vigorously clean it for 15 seconds with an alcohol wipe.
3. Always use a 10-mL syringe to flush your catheter. NEVER USE FORCE to flush your catheter.

Important Information about Flushing the Catheter
- If your catheter is not used daily, flush each lumen once per day with 3 mL of heparin (10u/mL). Please tell your provider or nurse if you have an allergy to heparin.
- If you use your catheter to give medications, flush your catheter with 5-10 mL of normal saline BEFORE the medication.
- AFTER your dose of medication is finished, flush the catheter with 5-10 mL of normal saline and...
3 mL of heparin (10u/mL). We will supply you with pre-filled syringes. Follow these steps:
1. Remove the cap from the syringe. Twist the syringe tip into the injection cap at the end of the catheter.
2. Unclamp the catheter and push all of the saline or heparin into the catheter using the “push and pause” method (your nurse will show you how to do this).
3. Reclamp the catheter after flushing.
   • The clamps should always be closed when the line is not in use to prevent air getting in or blood leaking out.
   • If the catheter has more than one lumen (tube), repeat the flushing procedure for each of them. Use a new syringe for each lumen.

If Your Catheter Will Not Flush
• Check to make sure the catheter clamp is open.
• If the clamp is open, your catheter may be plugged with a blood clot. Call your nurse or doctor. A medication can be placed in the catheter to dissolve the blockage.

How Do I Change My Dressing?
Change your dressing at least once per week. If your dressing becomes wet, soiled, or loose, change it immediately. Below are step-by-step instructions for changing the dressing.

Step One: Prepare to Change the Dressing
1. Clean your work area. It is very important to change your dressing using a clean, sanitized surface. You can wash the surface with soap and water or cover it with a clean linen cloth or paper towel.
2. Get your dressing change kit, which should include these items:
   • A pair of sterile gloves
   • A transparent adhesive dressing
   • A package of a Chlorahexidine® sponge
   • An injection cap for each lumen, or one extension set with injection cap
   • A new anchor device
If you do not have a kit, gather these supplies separately. Ask your nurse or doctor if you have questions about any of these items. Bring a trash can close to easily discard the old dressing.
3. Wash your hands thoroughly before and after any contact with your catheter. Use warm water and soap or an alcohol-based gel.

Step Two: Remove the Old Dressing
1. With clean hands, remove the old dressing by gently pulling up the edges of the transparent dressing. Carefully peel the dressing off toward the insertion site while holding the catheter at the site so it does not get pulled out. NEVER use scissors or other sharp objects to remove the dressing.
2. Discard the old dressing in a trash can.
3. Gently separate the catheter from the anchor device. Discard the current anchor device into the trash can.
4. Inspect the catheter, insertion site, and surrounding skin for signs of infection such as redness, swelling, or pus. If you see any of these, finish changing the dressing; then notify your health care provider right away.

Step Three: Put the New Dressing Materials on Your Clean Work Surface
1. Open the sterile gloves packet or the dressing change kit and lay it flat on your clean work surface.
2. Put all other supplies, including the new anchor device, on the clean work surface.
3. Put on the sterile gloves.

Step Four: Clean the Line Insertion Area
1. Squeeze the two wings of the Chlorahexidine sponge to release the liquid.
2. Press the sponge to the site where the catheter comes out of your skin.
4. Discard the sponge.
5. Allow the scrubbed area to dry COMPLETELY (this takes two to three minutes). Do not fan or blow on the cleaned area.

Step Five: Apply the New Dressing
1. Apply the new anchor device to the site and snap the catheter onto the anchor device.
2. Remove the backing from the transparent adhesive dressing.
3. Cover the insertion site and anchor device with the transparent dressing.
4. Seal all edges of the dressing.
Step Six: Change the Injection Caps or Extension Tubing with Injection Caps
1. Be sure the catheter is clamped.
2. Remove the injection cap or extension tubing with injection cap at the end of the tubing.
3. Replace with a new cap or a new extension tubing with injection cap.
4. If you have more than one lumen, change the injection cap for each.

Step Seven: Clean Up
1. Remove gloves and discard into the trash can.
2. Discard all old dressing change materials.
3. Wash your hands.

When Should I Call My Doctor?
Call your doctor if any of these symptoms develop:
- Redness, swelling, oozing, or a fever above 101°F
- Swelling, tenderness, or redness in the neck, chest, or arm

These may be signs of an infection or clot.

How Is the Catheter Removed?
Your health care team will remove the catheter. First, they clean and numb your chest. Next, they gently loosen and remove the catheter. Usually this does not take more than a few minutes, but it can be uncomfortable. Finally, they put a dressing over the site and ask you to remain lying down until it is certain that there is no bleeding.

If You Have Questions
For any question or problem with your tunneled catheter, call your provider or clinic at this number:

_________________________________________

After hours or weekends, call 801-585-0100 and ask for the oncologist on call.