

Feeding into your bloodstream (parenteral nutrition)

This information sheet is for people having parenteral nutrition in a hospital.

What is parenteral nutrition?

Parenteral nutrition (PN) is intravenous (IV) feeding or feeding into your bloodstream. It is generally used when your digestive tract (also known as the bowel or gut) is unable to break down and take up food and nutrition the usual way.

How is PN provided?

Parenteral nutrition is provided through a line into your bloodstream, usually into a large vein near the heart. The most common type of line is called a PICC (peripherally inserted central catheter).

What nutrition does PN contain?

Parenteral nutrition provides you with all the nutrients your body needs, in a form that your body can use straight from the bloodstream:

- Water
- Protein
- Glucose (sugar)
- Fats
- Vitamins and minerals

What are the risks of PN?

Parenteral nutrition carries risks like all medical treatments. To minimise these risks, PN is prescribed and carefully monitored by dietitians and doctors and is provided by specially trained nursing staff. The risks of PN include:

- Risks relating to the line used to give PN, such as line infection or blood clot.
- Refeeding syndrome – where shifts in fluid and blood salts occur after a period of poor nutrition shortly after nutrition is restarted.
- Altered liver function (usually only a concern with long-term PN).

How will my progress be monitored while I am on PN?

Your progress will be carefully monitored by your treating team, including:

- Regular blood tests
- Checking your blood glucose levels
- Checking your weight regularly
- Recording the fluid you receive and the fluid that leaves your body

Frequently asked questions:

When will I be able to start eating?

Your doctor will tell you when you can start eating and what diet you should have. This may change throughout your hospital admission.

Will I feel hungry or thirsty?

Although PN reduces hunger in most people, you may still experience some hunger even when all your nutrition is provided through the vein. If your mouth feels dry please ask your doctor or nurse what mouth cares are suitable for you.

Can I move around while PN is connected?

Yes, you will be encouraged to walk around the ward as much as your condition allows. The physiotherapist, occupational therapist or nurse may assist you. Parenteral nutrition may also be provided overnight only to encourage movement during the day.

Will my bowels keep working?

Stomach and bowel secretions, mucous, cells and bacteria may still form bowel movements. PN goes straight into your bloodstream and will not cause diarrhoea (loose bowel motions), abdominal (stomach) pain or nausea (feeling sick).