Arterial Line Placement

An arterial or “art-line” is a thin, hollow tube (catheter) placed in an artery in the wrist, arm, or the groin. An artery is a blood vessel where you can feel your pulse.

An art-line is used to:

- **Constantly monitor blood pressure:** The art-line is attached to a monitor, which displays a waveform and numbers. This tells the health care provider what your blood pressure is at all times.
- **Draw blood samples:** The art-line may be placed to obtain frequent arterial blood gases or ABGs; this test is used to monitor the amount of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the blood and can show how well you are breathing. ABGs as well as other blood samples can be drawn off the art-line decreasing the number of times you will need to be stuck with a needle to get a blood test.

Risks

As with any procedure, there are risks. Some of the risks include:

- **Pain** – You may feel a poke as the doctor inserts the needle. Local numbing agents are used to limit pain. Once the needle is in and the catheter is in place, the pain lessens.
- **Infection** – Any tube entering the body can make it easier for bacteria from the skin to get into the bloodstream. Special care in cleaning the skin and applying the dressing is done to decrease the risk of infection.

Common Questions

**How long will the catheter stay in?**
This varies. The art line will stay in as long as it is needed (to measure blood pressure or to take frequent blood samples to measure the amount of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the blood).

**Can I move around while the catheter is in?**
Yes, but be mindful of the art line while doing so. The art line is often sutured in but could, like any line, be accidentally tugged on and pulled out. Please ask for help especially when getting out of bed.

**Can the arterial catheter be used to give medicine like an intravenous line?**
No. The art line will be connected to fluid which drips in very slowly to prevent the line from clotting. Medicine cannot be given in an art-line because it is too irritating to the artery and as a result could cause tissue damage.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person’s health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 11/2015 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#6344