Phlebitis

Introduction
This leaflet gives you information about phlebitis, its causes and how to try to prevent it.

What is phlebitis?
Phlebitis is the medical term for inflammation or irritation of the walls of the veins.
You may notice red or dark marks on your hand or arm. Sometimes these look dry like a minor graze, or the veins may feel hard, they can even look sunken in some areas and feel tight.

What causes phlebitis?
‘Chemical phlebitis’ is caused by antibiotics, chemotherapy or other medications that have been given into your vein.
‘Mechanical phlebitis’ is caused by the cannula (a thin tube inserted in to the vein used to give medication). The cannula can irritate the walls of the vein.

Can phlebitis be prevented?
We try to prevent phlebitis by:
- Inserting a small cannula into a large vein to administer (give) your medications through
  - Diluting the medications with extra fluids so that they aren’t so strong
  - Flushing extra fluid through the vein to remove any traces of the medication
  - Using a heat pad to open up the vein
What can I do to help?
Things that increase the blood supply to the area help the most, such as:

• Sooth your skin using heat from a warm hot-water bottle or microwavable pad. These items should be covered to protect your skin
• Raise your arm high (above the heart) then rest it there using a pillow for support. Do this for as long as is comfortable
• Massage your arm and apply a simple moisturiser to the skin
• Gentle repetitive stretching exercises of the arm if your veins feel tight. Just to the point of the veins starting to pull, not so that it gets sore
• Self-refer to your local physiotherapist if you are having problems with moving or straightening your arm or access the next steps physiotherapist; the number is at the end of this leaflet
• Apply ibuprofen gel on unbroken skin this will help with the pain and inflammation. You can buy this over the counter at a pharmacy or chemist. Always follow the instruction in the pack. • If the area is not getting any better your nurse or doctor can prescribe a cream called Hirudoid. This cream is to be applied sparingly and massaged into the area twice a day. It is a local anti-coagulant which, when applied to the skin, relieves pain and inflammation in addition to promoting healing

Contact information
Please contact the Chemotherapy Helpline if you have any concerns.

Chemotherapy Helpline (24hrs)
Tel: 0300 422 3444

Physiotherapy Self-referral
Tel: 0300 421 6586

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