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Where to lay the pigtail



Overview

Mastering the Percutaneous Pigtail Thoracostomy Pigtail catheters are successfully used for the management of air or fluid in the pleural Pigtail Wire Inst.

Key Takeaways

Pigtail catheters are typically placed in the 4th to 5th intercostal space along the mid- to anterior-axillary line, using a percutaneous Seldinger technique to safely drain air or fluid from the pleural space.Indications

Pigtail catheters are used for drainage of pneumothorax, hemothorax, pleural effusions, and for pleurodesis in select cases. They are preferred over large-bore chest tubes in stable patients due to less pain, lower risk of hemorrhage, and shorter hospital stays .

Anatomical Landmarks
• Safety triangle: bordered by the lateral edge of the pectoralis major, lateral edge of the latissimus dorsi, and a line along the 5th intercostal space at the nipple level .

• Optimal insertion site: often the 4th to 5th intercostal space along the mid- to anterior-axillary line, where the chest wall is thinnest and easier to access .

• Alternative site: anterior approach in the 2nd intercostal space, mid-clavicular line, may be used in certain pneumothorax cases .
Technique
• Patient positioning: Supine with the arm abducted or overhead to expose the lateral chest wall .

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• Sterile preparation: Use full sterile precautions including mask, gown, gloves, and draping .

• Local anesthesia: Administer incrementally over the superior aspect of the rib to avoid the neurovascular bundle running along the inferior rib margin .

• Needle insertion: Enter slightly above the rib below, advance in small increments, aspirate to confirm pleural entry, and inject additional local anesthesia between the internal and innermost intercostal muscles .

• Catheter placement: Use the Seldinger technique—insert a guidewire through the needle, dilate the tract, and advance the pigtail catheter over the wire into the pleural space .

• Confirmation: Ensure proper placement via aspiration of air or fluid and imaging (chest X-ray or ultrasound) to confirm position and lung re-expansion .

Complications

Potential complications include:

• Tube malposition or blockage

• Re-expansion pulmonary edema

• Nerve, vascular, or lung injury

• Subcutaneous emphysema or infection

Advantages

• Less invasive and painful than large-bore chest tubes

• Reduced risk of bleeding, especially in anticoagulated patients

• Shorter procedure time and hospital stay

• Effective for non-clotted, non-viscous pleural fluid and simple pneumothoraces

Proper technique, careful landmark identification, and incremental anesthesia are key to minimizing complications and ensuring effective drainage.

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