

CARING FOR YOUR VASCULAR ACCESS

One of the most difficult challenges hemodialysis patients have to face is the need to keep their vascular access “working right”.

To receive enough dialysis you need a fistula, graft or catheter that is working right. Learning how to take care of your fistula, graft or catheter will help you keep your access working it's best.

A *fistula* usually takes anywhere from 1 to 3 months and sometimes longer for it to become “mature”. When the fistula is mature, it is large and strong enough to be used for hemodialysis. When you get your fistula, there are special exercises that you should do to make your fistula develop and work better. Ask your doctor or nurse to show you the exercises.

A *graft*, according to experts should be allowed to heal 2-6 weeks before it is used for dialysis. This access does not require special exercises.

After your “access” operation, your arm may be swollen and bruised. This is normal and will go away in two to three weeks if you elevate your arm. Elevating your arm will also make it feel more comfortable.

Here are some things to remember:

- Make sure that your needles are not put in the same spot every treatment. Needle sites should be moved around your access and kept as far apart as 1-2 inches from treatment to treatment.
- Keep your vascular access clean at all times. Your nurses or technicians should do three things before they put needles in your access: wash their hands, put on gloves, and clean the skin over your access.
- Check for pulse and signs of infection on your fistula or graft first thing in the morning EVERY DAY! If you have **no** pulse or have redness, increased tenderness or swelling report these signs to your nurse and doctor immediately.
- Learn how to take care of your fistula or graft.
 - Do not wear tight clothes or jewelry around your fistula or graft.
 - If your fistula or graft is in your arm, do not sleep on that arm.
 - Be careful not to bump or cut your fistula or graft.
 - Do not let anyone take your blood pressure, draw blood, or put IV's in the arm or leg that has a working access.
- If you have a catheter make sure that:
 - You don't touch the skin where the catheter goes under the skin.
 - Keep area clean and covered.
 - Don't allow your clothes to pull on the catheter.
 - You and your nurse must wear a mask when catheter is connected or disconnected from the blood lines.

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ESRD Network 18

Protect Your Access - Help Yourself

- ◆ Make sure that your needles are not put in the same spot every treatment.
 - ◆ Needles sites should be moved around your access and kept as far apart as 1 to 2 inches from treatment to treatment.

- ◆ Keep your vascular access clean at home and at the facility.
 - ◆ Your nurses or technicians should do three things before they put needles in your access:
 1. Wash their hands
 2. Put on gloves
 3. Clean the skin over your access

- ◆ Everyday, first thing in the morning, check your pulse in the fistula or graft area!
 - ◆ This will help you find problems like clotting or infection. If you have NO pulse or have redness, increased tenderness or swelling, report these signs to your nurse and doctor immediately

- ◆ Learn how to take care of your fistula or graft.
 - ◆ Do not wear tight clothes or jewelry around your fistula or graft area.
 - ◆ If your fistula or graft is in your arm, do not sleep on that arm.
 - ◆ Be careful not to bump or cut your fistula or graft.
 - ◆ Do not let anyone take your blood pressure, draw blood or put IVs in the arm or leg that has a working fistula or graft.

- ◆ If you have a catheter, make sure that:
 - ◆ You do not touch the area where the catheter goes under your skin.
 - ◆ You keep the area where the catheter goes under your skin clean, dry and covered.
 - ◆ You do not allow your clothes to pull on the catheter.
 - ◆ You and your nurse wear a mask when your catheter is connected or disconnected from blood lines.

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