

YOUR HEMODIALYSIS CATHETER

Some people call their hemodialysis catheter (vascular access) a lifeline because it makes dialysis possible. Learning all you can about your hemodialysis catheter is important.....and this brochure is a tool to do just that. If you still have questions after reading this, talk to your doctor or other member of the health care team.

What is a vascular access?

A **vascular access** is a way for the health care team to access your bloodstream over and over again. Each time you have a hemodialysis treatment this access is used and is connected by a tube to a dialysis machine. One tube takes the blood to the dialysis machine to be cleaned. Another tube returns the clean blood to your body. This process of taking blood to and from your body to the dialysis machine is repeated many times during a dialysis run.

There are three types of vascular access:

- A fistula
- A graft
- A catheter

This brochure gives you information about hemodialysis catheters and their care.

What is a “hemodialysis catheter”?

A hemodialysis catheter is a piece of tubing that is usually inserted into a large vein in your neck or chest. This can be done in the Radiology Department, in the operating room or on a nursing unit.

To insert a catheter, the doctor makes a small cut in your skin over the vein. The catheter is threaded into the vein and is attached to your skin. A bandage covers the area where the catheter enters the skin.

Part of the hemodialysis catheter extends a few inches out of your skin. It has two tubes and these are clamped and sealed when not in use. Hemodialysis tubing connects to the catheter tubing.

In general, catheters do not last as long as fistulas and grafts, and have more problems such as infections and clotting. That is why they are not the first or second choice for vascular access.

However, a catheter can be used immediately. So if you need to start hemodialysis before your fistula or graft is ready to use, or you cannot have a fistula or graft due to medical reasons, a temporary access (hemodialysis catheter) is needed to access your bloodstream.



Hemodialysis Catheter in Neck



Hemodialysis Catheter in Chest

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What do I need to do after the catheter is inserted?

- 1. Monitor your discomfort level.** If your discomfort is mild to moderate, take the pain medication your doctor suggested. If this does not work, tell your doctor or nurse.
- 2. Take care of your bandage.** Keep your bandage clean and dry. A tub bath is the best way to wash. If your bandage peels off or gets wet, wash your hands well and remove what is left of the bandage. Put on a clean, dry 4x4 gauze and tape it in place. Go to your dialysis unit to have a proper dressing applied.
- 3. Watch for swelling.** You may notice swelling around your neck. If you have difficulty talking or breathing, tell your doctor or nurse right away.

How do I keep my catheter healthy?

- Try not to touch the catheter as this can lead to infection.
- Do not use sharp objects like scissors near the catheter tubing.
- Wear a mask over your nose and mouth anytime the nurse opens the catheter. The nurse changing the dressing should wear a mask and gloves as well.
- Do not open your catheter.* Both the end caps and clamps of your catheter should be kept tightly closed. Only your dialysis nurse or physician should remove the caps or clamps.

* If you are part of the home hemodialysis program, your doctor or nurse will provide specific instructions.

- Wear a Medical Alert bracelet or carry a card in your wallet to let health care workers know that you have a hemodialysis catheter. *Ensure your bracelet or card includes where your catheter is located.*

When should I call my kidney doctor (nephrologist) or dialysis unit?

- If there is any redness, warmth or pain along the catheter.
- If there is any oozing or drainage from your exit site.
- You have noticeable swelling or itching around your catheter or neck. You are feverish, and have any of the above symptoms.
- You notice the part of your catheter outside your skin seems to be getting longer.
- Your catheter is accidentally pulled and there is bleeding around the exit site.

This brochure can be downloaded from the BC Renal Agency website: www.bcrenalagency.ca

The information in this pamphlet is provided for educational/information purposes, and to support discussion with your health care team about your medical condition and treatment. It does not constitute medical advice and should not substitute for advice given by your physician or other qualified health care professional.