

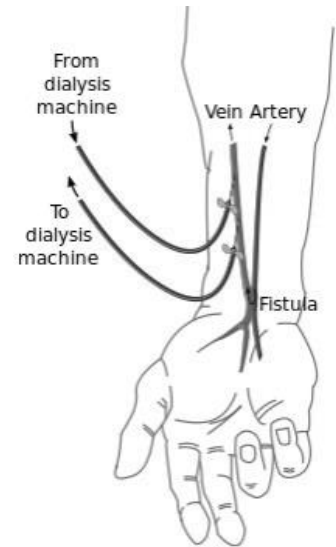
When your kidneys no longer work one treatment choice is haemodialysis. For this dialysis to take place a special passageway to your bloodstream needs to be created. **It is called a fistula.**

How is a fistula formed?

A surgeon joins a vein to an artery underneath the skin which allows the blood to flow from the artery into the vein. This in turn causes the vein to become bigger and stronger, allowing for easier repeated cannula insertions. The veins are close to your skin's surface making the access easy to reach.

The fistula is usually placed in the non-dominant forearm. If the veins in the forearm are not suitable the fistula can be placed in the upper arm.

A fistula is a way for the nurses to access your bloodstream over and over again to allow dialysis to take place. 2 cannulas are inserted into the vein each treatment. One takes the blood to the machine to be cleaned and the other to return the filtered blood back into your body. The cannulas are removed after each dialysis treatment.



Meeting the Surgeon

The surgeon will assess your veins and arteries prior to surgery.

At your first appointment with the vascular surgeon your arms will be assessed for fistula suitability.

Assessments made include:

- Is there good blood supply to your hands?
- Are the veins in your arm healthy and long enough?
- Could your vessels be poor due to diabetes, heart disease or previous surgeries?
- Are your veins close to the surface of your skin for easy access?
- An ultrasound will also be done to find out the size of your vessels.

Don't be afraid to ask questions about your operation.

What to Do After Surgery

Keep wound dry for one week post creation and do not soak or scrub incision until it has healed.

Watch for signs and symptoms of infection such as ooze (pus) from your wound, swelling, redness, warmth and pain or fever.

If you are not sure, you can compare your fistula limb to your other limb.

Report to your doctor immediately if any of these symptoms are present.

Once your fistula has been created the doctors and vascular access nurse will keep an eye on it at regular intervals to make sure it is developing well. A fistula is, ideally, mature and ready to use after the vein is larger and the blood vessel wall is thicker, which takes around 1-3 months.

A follow up appointment with your vascular surgeon is very important and usually takes place 6 weeks after your surgery.

You may need to see your GP if stitches need to be removed.

How to Keep Your Fistula Healthy

Feel your fistula and check for a thrill (buzzing feeling) every morning and night. Nurses will teach you how to do this before you leave hospital.

Do not allow anyone to take blood pressure or blood from this arm or put in a drip. This is to make sure that the veins in this arm are not harmed prior to and following surgery. This fistula arm is to be used for Haemodialysis only.

Avoid low blood pressure and dehydration.

Never put pressure on your fistula with tight clothing, a watch or bracelet. Don't sleep on your fistula arm or carry heavy items draped over your fistula. This will cause squeezing of the fistula which can slow blood flow in the fistula causing the fistula to stop working.

Report any changes to your fistula such as;

- Your fingers become cold, blue or numb
- There is a change in the thrill
- There are signs of infection
- Bleeding from your fistula
- Tenderness

If you have any concerns please contact your Vascular Surgeon.

Exercising Your Fistula

As soon as the pain from your surgery has subsided, start forearm exercises (see below). These exercises can increase blood flow to your fistula, helping it grow, strengthen and mature faster.

Remember your fistula will be your lifeline so caring for your fistula is very important.

It's up to you to keep your fistula as healthy as possible. Taking good care of your fistula can help you have a better life on dialysis.

Grab a Clothes Peg

- Take a normal clothes peg
- Squeeze it open with your index finger and thumb, allowing it to close again
- Repeat this exercise for 5 minutes, 6 times a day



Squeeze a soft ball

- Hold the ball in the hand of your fistula arm
- Let your arm hang down beside your body
- Squeeze the ball by opening and closing your hand repeatedly for about 5 minutes

Touching your fingertips

- Touch each finger "to" the tip of your thumb, repeating this action for 5 minutes
- Remember to open your hand after each touch
- Touch your fingertips to thumb repeatedly for 5 minutes, 6 times a day



Contact Details

If you require any other information please speak with your Vascular Surgeon.

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