

The best care for your fistula (vascular access) is essential.

Only a few sites on your body are suitable for a graft or fistula. It is important to care for your vascular access to ensure it lasts for as long as possible.

Effective dialysis relies on a good functioning vascular access. It is important to check your fistula/graft every day. Best practice would be three times a day: in the morning when rising; at midday before lunch; and just before going to bed.

- To check your access use the palm of your hand to feel over the fistula site
- Feel for a vibration, buzz or pulse often referred to as a thrill

If you cannot feel a buzz or pulse, it is essential to contact the renal dialysis unit as soon as possible.

If the dialysis unit is closed, go to the emergency department of your nearest hospital.

Immediate action will save you time, worry and the potential of losing your vascular access.

Every day check for:

- Redness
- Swelling
- Pain
- Pus or open sores
- Numbness
- Warmth
- Fever
- Changes to your fistula

If any of the above symptoms occur, please contact your dialysis unit immediately.

Accessing the fistula

It is important to take proper care of your fistula. If an infection gets in through the fistula, it easily spreads through the blood stream and can cause infection in organs like the heart. It is essential that your access be cleaned before use.

Before the needles are inserted, you should wash your fistula/graft arm with soap and water and an antibacterial solution.

Dressing the access site

Dressings will be applied post dialysis. The dressings should remain on for a minimum of four to six hours. If the site bleeds, apply pressure using a dressing. If the site continues to bleed contact your dialysis unit or nearest emergency department.

Reminders for fistula care

- Never wear tight sleeves, watches, jewellery or the like over or around your fistula
- Never carry heavy shopping bags or handbags on your fistula/graft arm because this will stop blood flowing through the fistula
- Never wear a hospital identification band on your fistula/graft arm
- Never allow anyone to collect blood, insert a cannula or take a blood pressure on your fistula/graft arm unless authorised by your nephrologist
- Always keep your fistula warm in cool weather, this helps maintain blood circulation

For more information please contact us:
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