

Haemodialysis Access

Haemodialysis, also called dialysis, is the most common treatment for kidney failure. In order to perform any type of dialysis treatment, access is required. An Arterio Venous (AV) Fistula is a surgical connection between an artery and a vein allowing the vein to receive a larger volume of blood. This enlarges the vein making it easier for the vein to be punctured for dialysis.

How to care for your fistula

- Check your fistula is working throughout the day by placing your finger over the fistula. This is called feeling for ‘thrill’ and produces a distinct buzzing feeling over the fistula. If you listen through a stethoscope you can hear the sound of the blood “whooshing” through the fistula, this is called ‘bruit’.
- Avoid carrying and lifting heavy objects with your fistula arm.
- Avoid wearing tight clothing or watches on your fistula arm, as this can cause clotting.
- Ensure you do not get dehydrated as this can cause your fistula to fail.
- Avoid sleeping on your fistula arm.
- Do not scratch or pick the scabs from needle sites as this can introduce infection or cause bleeding.
- Do not let your hands get too cold. Wear gloves outside in cold weather.

You must contact the Renal Unit immediately if you notice any of the following:

- The fistula is red, hot to touch, painful or weeping fluid.
- Bruit (the sounds from your fistula) stops, or is noticeably weaker than normal.
- Your hand becomes cold/ blue/ painful, or you experience pins and needles.
- Your hand becomes swollen or puffy.



If you are advised to come in to hospital, keep your fistula warm. If your fistula has become weaker or has stopped, inform nursing staff as you may need to stop any blood pressure tablets before coming in to hospital.

Bleeding from your fistula:

If your fistula or graft starts to bleed at home, raise the arm and apply pressure to the bleeding site with your hand and some gauze. Apply pressure for 10 minutes and then check to see if bleeding has stopped. If it has stopped re-apply fresh gauze and tape. If bleeding is excessive and does not stop, contact your Dialysis Unit.

Very rarely, a fistula can 'burst' at home. If this happens, follow these steps below:

- Call 999 for an ambulance immediately.
- If you are a carer, put on gloves from your emergency pack.
- Apply pressure over the bleeding site (using gauze swabs or a clean towel).
- Raise the arm above the level of the heart (if able to do so) to help control the bleeding.

You will be supplied with gauze, tape and gloves once you start to use your fistula.

To avoid any damage, never let anyone:

- Take blood specimens from the fistula arm.
- Put a drip or cannula in that arm (except if advised by a senior doctor from the Renal Unit).
- Take blood pressure in that arm.

Other access options

Haemodialysis can also be done through a tube placed in your neck or groin. This can be permanent or temporary, and can be used straight away. This will have a dressing on, and should be kept clean and dry at all times. You cannot go swimming or get the tubes wet, and there is a higher risk of infection than a fistula or graft. You will be supplied with an emergency pack (spare caps, gloves, wipes, clamps and gauze) and advised how to use them in case your line splits or caps fall off.

If you have any further questions, staff will be pleased to explain this information further.



Contact numbers for patients already on regular haemodialysis:

Doncaster Dialysis Unit, Tel: 01302 381455.

Bassetlaw Dialysis Unit, Tel: 01909 511150.

Dearne Valley Dialysis Unit, Tel: 01709 599190.

Doncaster Royal Infirmary, Renal Ward 32, Tel: 01302 647038.

For patients who have not yet started regular haemodialysis:

Doncaster Royal Infirmary, Renal Out Patient Department, Monday-Friday
Tel: 01302 647043.

Doncaster Royal Infirmary, Renal Ward 32, Tel: 01302 647038 - out of
hours and weekends.

Patient Advice & Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS staff are available to offer advice or information on healthcare matters. The office is in the Main Foyer (Gate 4) of Doncaster Royal Infirmary. Contact can be made either in person, by telephone or email. PALS staff can also visit inpatients on all Trust sites.

The contact details are:

Telephone: 01302 553140 or 0800 028 8059

Email: pals.dbh@dbh.nhs.uk



