



## 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 these 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 into 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 do not 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.