

Fistula for Hemodialysis – After Care

Develop your fistula

After the stitches or clips are removed or dissolved and the incision has healed, you need to exercise your fistula several times a day. Exercise helps your fistula get bigger and stronger. Hemodialysis is easier with a well-developed fistula.

It takes up to 8 to 12 weeks for a fistula to become strong and ready to use. You will have another appointment with the surgeon or vascular access nurse to check the size and development of your fistula in 4 to 6 weeks.

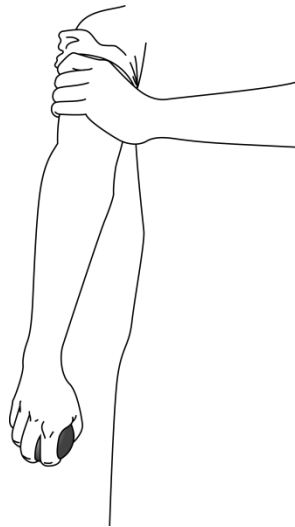
To exercise the fistula, you need:

- 2 washcloths rolled into a tube shape and taped **or**
- a soft sponge ball – ask the vascular access team for a ball

Follow these steps:



1. Hold the roll or ball lightly at your side.



2. Apply pressure to your fistula arm below the armpit with your other hand. At the same time, squeeze the roll or ball 5 times.



3. Rest your arm and hand. Be sure to rest for a longer time than you squeezed.

4. Repeat the steps above 5 times. This is called 1 set.

5. Do 1 set of exercises 3 to 5 times each day.

You can exercise your fistula while you read, walk, watch TV or take a break at work or school throughout your day.

What problems can I have with my fistula?

Your dialysis care team will help you learn what to look for to prevent problems.

You should watch for:

- infection
- clotting
- bleeding

Infection

It is important to watch for signs of infection:

- the skin around the fistula is red, warm or hot to touch
- your arm is swollen, tender or painful to touch
- you have a fever or chills
- you see drainage around the incision



If you have any of these signs, contact your dialysis care team right away.

Prevent infection

- ✘ **Do not scratch the skin around the fistula area.** Let your dialysis care team know if your skin is itchy. Scratching may cause your skin to break and become infected. Medication and/or cream can be ordered or the cleaning solution can be changed.

Check your fistula for clotting

There are 2 ways to check for good blood flow in the fistula:

1. You can listen for a sound called a bruit near the fistula incision site. You pronounce the word bruit like brew-ee.
2. You can feel for a thrill at the fistula incision site. A thrill feels like buzzing under your skin.

The bruit and thrill tell you that your fistula is working. Check your fistula every day.

Your dialysis care team will show you how to listen and feel for a bruit and thrill in your fistula. If you do not hear the bruit or feel a thrill, call your dialysis care team right away. It may mean that the blood flow has stopped.



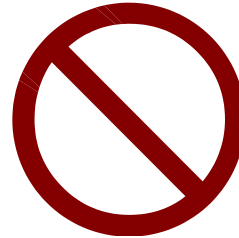
Prevent clotting

To prevent blood clotting:

- Protect your fistula from bumping.
- Do not carry heavy objects or loads with your fistula arm.
- Do not wear tight things on your fistula arm.
- Do not sleep with pressure on your fistula arm.

✘ Do not let anyone:

- Take blood from your fistula arm.
- Start an intravenous in your fistula arm.
- Take a blood pressure on your fistula arm.



Working together

It is important for your fistula to last as long as it can. When you work closely with your health care team, your fistula can last for years.

Each time you come for dialysis treatments make sure the needles are put in a different spot. Moving the needle sites $\frac{1}{4}$ inch or 5 mm along your fistula arm lets your blood vessels heal and helps your fistula last.

Where can I get help?

If you have any questions or concerns contact your nephrologist, vascular access team or a member of your dialysis care team.

Medical Alert Identification

You should wear medical alert identification.

You can get an application from your pharmacy.

Talk to your vascular access team or your dialysis care team about what to have written on the medical alert identification.



Notes: