

Caring for Your Dialysis Access: Your Daily Guide

Medical-Surgical · Renal & Genitourinary

A fistula or graft joins an artery and a vein in your arm. This is where the dialysis needles go. It is your lifeline for dialysis, so protect it every day.

Check it every day

- Feel for the thrill: a buzz or gentle vibration over the access.
- Listen for the bruit: a whooshing sound. Use a stethoscope if you have one.
- Check when you wake up and after dialysis.
- **A weaker buzz: call today. No buzz at all: call 911.**

Let it heal first

- A new fistula needs 6 to 8 weeks or longer to get strong before use.
- A graft is usually ready in 2 to 3 weeks.
- Do the hand exercises your care team teaches you.

Protect your access arm

- No blood pressure checks, blood draws, or IVs in this arm. Remind every nurse and doctor.
- No tight sleeves, watches, or jewelry on this arm.
- Do not sleep on this arm.
- Do not carry more than 10 pounds with this arm, or hang a bag on it.

Keep it clean

- Wash the access with soap and water before each dialysis.
- Keep it dry between treatments.
- Do not scratch it or pick at scabs.

If a needle site bleeds

- Press firmly on the spot with clean gauze for 10 minutes. Do not lift the gauze to peek.
- If it still bleeds after 10 minutes of pressure, call 911.

Call your provider today if you have

- A weaker buzz or whooshing sound
- Redness, warmth, swelling, or drainage at the access
- Fever or chills

Call 911 or your local emergency number if you have

- No buzz and no whooshing sound at all
- Bleeding that does not stop with firm pressure
- A cold, numb, or pale hand on your access arm

This handout supports, not replaces, advice from your own nurse or doctor.

Online: nclexpace.com/patient-education/dialysis-fistula-care/patient

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