

Vascular Access for Hemodialysis

Your Hemodialysis Catheter

What is a vascular access?

A **vascular access** is a way for the health care team to access your bloodstream over and over again. Each time you have a hemodialysis treatment this access is accessed and is connected by a tube to a dialysis machine. One tube takes the blood to the dialysis machine to be cleaned. Another tube returns the clean blood to your body. This process of taking blood to and from your body to the dialysis machine is continuous during a dialysis run.

There are three types of vascular access:

- A fistula
- A graft
- A catheter

This pamphlet gives you information about hemodialysis catheters.

What is a “hemodialysis catheter”?

A hemodialysis catheter is a piece of tubing that is usually inserted into a large vein in your neck or chest.

Catheters are not the first choice for vascular access. They have more problems than fistulas and grafts such as infections and clotting. They also do not last as long. **A catheter can be used immediately so can be a bridge until you can get a fistula or graft.**

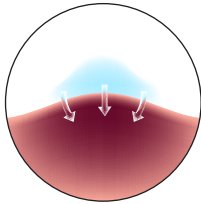


Hemodialysis Catheter in Neck

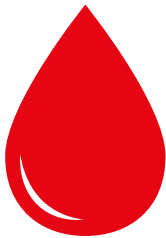


Hemodialysis Catheter in Chest

What do I need to do after the catheter is inserted?



- 1. Watch for swelling.** You may notice swelling around your neck. If you have difficulty talking or breathing, tell your doctor or nurse right away.

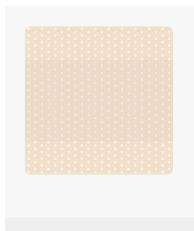


- 2. Check your catheter exit site for bleeding.** If you notice blood:

- Outline the bleeding on your dressing with a pen.
- Check your dressing every 15 minutes until the bleeding has stopped. If the bleeding increases:
 - Call for help! Let your family member(s), friend(s) or neighbour know.
 - Press firmly over the neck vein area while sitting up.
 - Go to the Emergency Department.



- 3. Monitor your discomfort level.** Take the pain medication your doctor suggested. If this does not work, tell your doctor or nurse.



- 4. Take care of your bandage.** Keep your bandage clean and dry. A tub bath is the best way to wash. If your bandage peels off or gets wet, wash your hands well and remove what is left of the bandage. Put on a clean, dry dressing or 4x4 gauze and tape it in place. Go to your dialysis unit to have a proper dressing applied.



Don't use sharp objects near catheter tubing



Use a mask



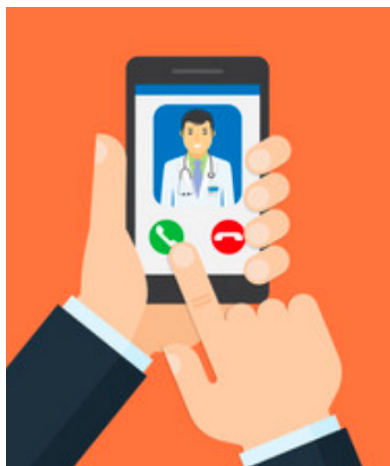
Wear a BC Renal wristband

How do I keep healthy with a catheter?

- Try not to touch the catheter as this can lead to infection.
- Do not use sharp objects like scissors near the catheter tubing.
- Wear a mask over your nose and mouth anytime the nurse opens the catheter. The nurse changing the dressing should wear a mask and gloves as well.
- Do not open your catheter.* Both the end caps and clamps of your catheter should be kept tightly closed. Only your dialysis nurse or physician should remove the caps or clamps.
** If you are part of the home hemodialysis program, your doctor or nurse will provide specific instructions.*
- Wear a Medical Alert bracelet or carry a card in your wallet to let health care workers know that you have a hemodialysis catheter. Make sure your bracelet or card includes where your catheter is located.

When should I call my kidney doctor (nephrologist) or dialysis unit?

- There is any redness, warmth or pain along the catheter.
- There is any oozing or drainage from your exit site.
- You have noticeable swelling or itching around your catheter or neck. You are feverish, and have any of the above symptoms.
- You notice the part of your catheter outside your skin seems to be getting longer.
- Your catheter is accidentally pulled and there is bleeding around the exit site.



The information in this pamphlet is provided for educational/information purposes, and to support discussion with your health care team about your medical condition and treatment. It does not constitute medical advice and should not substitute for advice given by your physician or other qualified health care professional.

This brochure can be downloaded from the BC Renal website: www.bcrenalagency.ca