

CARING FOR YOUR VASCULAR ACCESS

When diagnosed with chronic kidney disease, you should begin using light weights and doing exercises to strengthen the muscles of your arms. These exercises will increase blood flow through the veins in your arms, overtime, this will cause the veins to grow larger and become stronger. This will increase your chance of being able to have a fistula created and increase the likelihood that it will mature and be a usable access when needed. Having strong muscles in your arms will give the fistula extra support and stability making it easier to access for treatment.



✓ Exercise BEFORE AND AFTER Vascular Access Surgery

Exercising your AV fistula. If you have a fistula created, you will be given an object (like a foam kidney) or rubber ball to take home and use to “exercise” your fistula. You will allow your arm to hang by your side and squeeze the object with the hand of your access arm. It is best to do this 3-5 times a day for at least five minutes at a time.

✓ EXERCISE = FISTULA MATURITY ****

Appointments After Surgery. Regardless of fistula or graft, your surgeon will want to see you one week after your access is created to look, listen, and feel to make sure everything is ok. Write down questions or concerns and take advantage of the face to face time for education.

- Fistula – next appointment will typically be 4-6 weeks later for an ultrasound and to see the surgeon – It is at this appointment that you will find out if your access is ready to use or not.
- Graft – next appointment will typically be two weeks later to see the surgeon, you may or may not have an ultrasound – it is at this appointment that you will find out if your access is ready to use or not

The most important thing you do will be to keep your post op and ALL of your follow up appointments! Early identification of problems allows early intervention and reduces the risk of early access failure.

Keeping your access clean. Once your AV access is ready to be used for hemodialysis, it is important that you keep it clean.

- ❖ Look for redness, warmth, or swelling around the access area or bad smelling drainage that is not clear
- ❖ If you experience any pain in the fistula area, tell your doctor immediately
- ❖ If you get a fever, chills, sensation that your heart is beating very quickly, or experience dizziness these can be signs of infection – you should call 911
- ❖ Wash and pat dry your fistula arm thoroughly every day and right before each treatment.
- ❖ DO NOT pick at scabs

Proper blood flow through the fistula or graft. Blood needs to flow smoothly through your AV access. To reduce the risk of blood clots, be careful not to put extra pressure on the area. This may require some changes in your daily habits.

- ❖ Do not wear tight-fitting shirts
- ❖ Do not wear jewelry that may restrict blood flow on your access arm
- ❖ When carrying things (groceries, bags, luggage) make sure the straps or handles do not tighten around your access
- ❖ When having your blood pressure taken or blood drawn, **DO NOT USE YOUR FISTULA ARM**
 - ★ We will give you an armband to wear on your access arm that alerts others about your access and to stay away from that arm!
- ❖ When sitting or sleeping, make certain that your head, pillow, or cushion does not rest on your fistula

Checking your fistula or graft blood flow. Check the blood flow through your AV fistula daily. This is done by touch and sound. When you place your fingers over your fistula, you should be able to feel the motion of blood flowing through it. This sensation is called a “*thrill*”. Let your doctor know if the thrill ever feels different.

- Your vascular access team and dialysis clinic staff will listen to the blood flow by using a stethoscope. The sound heard is called a “*bruit*” (pronounced broo-ee). Any change in the pitch may indicate a clot or narrowing of the fistula.



***** IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU FEEL THE THRILL OF YOUR ACCESS EVERY SINGLE DAY. *****