

Hemodialysis

Dialysis is needed when your kidneys start to fail and can no longer clean waste and excess fluid from your blood, which can lead to high blood pressure and heart failure. Hemodialysis is the most common type of dialysis.

During hemodialysis, blood is taken out of your body and goes through an artificial kidney machine, where toxins and extra fluids are filtered out. Then the clean blood is returned back to your body.

There are 3 ways that your blood might be accessed during hemodialysis:

- Through an AV fistula, which is a direct connection made between a vein and an artery, usually in your arm. Two needles are placed in your fistula, the first to send the blood to the dialyzer and the second to return the clean blood to the body.
- With a graft, a soft plastic tube is placed beneath the skin linking an artery and a vein, usually when your blood vessels are not able to form a fistula. Or,
- Through a catheter, or tube, which is inserted directly into a large vein, usually in the neck or chest.

"That filter is basically taking all the bad things out of your body, keeping the good things and removing all that extra fluid that you drink in between your dialysis sessions. It's a continuous process that requires several hours of treatment in order to fully clean your blood." – Dr. Aaron Dall, Nephrologist/Kidney Specialist

Rogelio Garcia started hemodialysis in 2009 after being diagnosed with end stage renal disease.

"It's a lifestyle change definitely. But once you become accustomed to it it's like everyday business. You don't even think twice about it." – Rogelio, Patient

Typically, hemodialysis patients visit the dialysis clinic three times a week, every week, for about four hours at a time. You pick a timeframe that works for you, during the day or even at night, but it's still a big adjustment. Patients, like Venus Dickinson, have to rearrange their lives for dialysis.

Even though it is a big adjustment, patients, like Venus Dickinson, know that dialysis is important for their kidneys and their overall health...

"At first it was kind of rough, but then I just made a mind choice and prayed about it. It saved my life because I put it in my everyday life. I work fulltime and I just go to work and I go to dialysis and I go to church and I try to keep a normal life." – Venus, Patient

When you arrive for hemodialysis, you'll weigh yourself... then wash your fistula or graft area. The nurse or patient care technician will then take your blood pressure and attach you to the machine.

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"A lot of patients find out that this is very manageable and if you put your time and effort into it as well as we will, it doesn't defeat you and you know you can still live your life."

- Justin Martin, Dialysis Patient Care Technician

Most often hemodialysis is done in a clinic, usually during waking hours, but you may have the option to do it overnight, while you sleep. Less common is hemodialysis that is done at home. Your health care team will help you decide which approach is best for you.

"Oftentimes I want to know are they interested in still working? Do they have a lot of activities throughout the day that they might need to continue to do or want to do? Are they avid swimmers or do they have other hobbies that they enjoy that would make me think that one dialysis modality or method is better than another method? Oftentimes it really comes down to the patient's preference."

– Dr. Aaron Dall, Nephrologist/Kidney Specialist

If you have questions about hemodialysis and how it can help you, talk to your healthcare provider.

"There's a lot of support out there. There's a lot of education out there." – Rogelio, Patient

"This is your life. If you don't take control of it, it's up to you. It's really up to you to take it to heart."

- Venus, Patient