

# Accessing Your Fistula for Hemodialysis

If you have chronic kidney disease and are getting hemodialysis, you may have a fistula, probably in your arm, where you are connected to the dialysis machine that cleans your blood. It's important to understand how your healthcare team will access your fistula each time you go to the clinic for dialysis.

Before the dialysis begins, you'll weigh yourself to determine how much fluid needs to be removed during dialysis. Then you'll wash your fistula, a very important part of the process.

*"We are required to wash our fistula areas with soap and water before we get put on, obviously to help with preventing any type of infection." – Rogelio, Patient*

Narration: Then your nurse or technician will check your vitals.

*"They will have their blood pressure taken standing if they're able to stand. Then when they sit in the chair they'll have their blood pressure taken while they're sitting. They'll have the temperature taken and they'll report their weight to you." – Judy Geissler, DNP Dialysis Nurse*

Because your fistula is a direct access to your blood, guarding against infection is critical. That's why your dialysis tech will wear protective clothing as well as gloves at all times.

*"Your technician is in a white gown sometimes they're white, sometimes they're yellow. That is to protect them from your body fluids and to protect you from anything that our personnel might have. They will wear either a shield or goggles." – Judy Geissler, DNP Dialysis Nurse*

You should expect your tech to pay special attention to your fistula...how it sounds and how it feels.

*"We listen to the the access with the stethoscope to make sure that, you know, it has a normal sound. It's not a very faint sound; that there's no blockage or anything like that." – Justin Martin, Dialysis Patient Care Technician*

*"By assessing the thrill and bruie, or noise, and by looking at the behavior of the fistula or graft while the patient's on dialysis, you can get a handle on how it's flowing." – Allan Roza, MD, FACS Vascular Access Surgeon*

*"Sometimes you have arm accesses that are considered clotted. So we have to send them to the E.R. to get them de-clotted." – Justin Martin, Dialysis Patient Care Technician*

Other things the dialysis center staff will watch for is any sign of infection around the fistula, such as redness,

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warmth, pus, any skin irritation or temperature.

After your general health and fistula are checked, it's time to be connected to the machine. This is done with cannulation, 2 needles that are placed into your fistula.

*"They understand that it's their lifeline. And with the right technique and the skill level that we see in most dialysis units patients can be cannulated, or needled, repeatedly without too much stress or suffering."*

– Allan Roza, MD, FACS Vascular Access Surgeon

After 3 to 4 hours, when dialysis is complete, your blood pressure will be taken again.

*"You still want to make sure that they're in a safe range when they come in and when they leave."*

– Judy Geissler, DNP Dialysis Nurse

*"And that's just so that we know post treatment-wise once they finished with their sitting, if they stand up we can monitor them so they're not going to fall over or pass out."*

– Justin Martin, Dialysis Patient Care Technician

Before you are taken off the dialysis machine, a pressure dressing is applied to your fistula to prevent bleeding. Then you're free to go about your life until your next session.

*"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."*

– Rogelio, Patient

If you have any questions about your fistula or how it will be accessed during dialysis, talk to your healthcare provider.