

# What is an AV Fistula for Hemodialysis?

*"I was diagnosed with End Stage Renal Disease."*

For Rogelio Garcia, who's been battling diabetes and high blood pressure for years, that diagnosis led to hemodialysis. His kidney's were failing.

*"I was a little scared about it because, you know, because I didn't know how long I'd have to be on the machine and in the center and that sort of thing and I heard the stories about you get, you're real wiped out. So, I was concerned about that, but it was something that I had to otherwise it was going to be very bad for me in the end."*

Like Rogelio, most Hemodialysis patients go to a dialysis center 3 times a week so that an artificial kidney machine can clean their blood. There are different ways to access your blood and connect to the machine, but an AV Fistula should be considered first because it generally lasts longer and has fewer complications.

*"There's a lower rate of infection. The patients tend to get better dialysis through a fistula. The flows are usually higher therefore dialysis is more efficient."*

With an AV, or Arteriovenous Fistula, your surgeon will directly connect a vein to an artery, usually in your arm, to make a bigger blood vessel that can handle the movement of a lot of blood through the dialysis machine. From one needle in the fistula, blood is sent to this artificial kidney, where waste products and extra fluids are removed. Then the clean blood is returned to your body through a second needle into the venous, or vein end of the fistula.

*"It's a hyper vein or a giant vein, if you will, and that allows us to pump anywhere from 300 milliliters of blood to 500 milliliters of blood a minute."*

Exactly how much and how fast blood is pumped through the dialysis machine depends on the patient.

*"If you lose blood in a hurry you might get faint or dizzy or your blood pressure may fall. So, the blood is taken at a slow but constant rate, taken to the dialysis machine, cleaned and then delivered through a second needle, so called venous stick, and it's returned to the patient."*

To help keep your fistula working properly, avoid pressure on that arm. Don't wear tight clothes or jewelry that would compress the blood vessel. Don't carry anything heavy. Don't sleep with your head on the arm with the fistula, and don't let anyone use that arm to draw blood or check your blood pressure.

Even with the best care, over time, you may need procedures to keep the fistula running properly or you may even need a new fistula.

*"I would say that the average fistula is probably going to last anywhere from two to five years, hopefully longer. We need to ensure the patient is getting dialysis for as long as possible. And therefore, we need to maximize our options."*

Needing dialysis and a fistula may seem overwhelming, but your healthcare team is there to support you.

# What is an AV Fistula for Hemodialysis?

*"We understand that this is a difficult transition for them in their lives but it's not something that they have to just throw the towel in. A lot of patients find out that this is very manageable and if you put your time and effort into it (edit) it doesn't defeat you and you still can live your life."*