

Fistula for Hemodialysis – Getting Ready

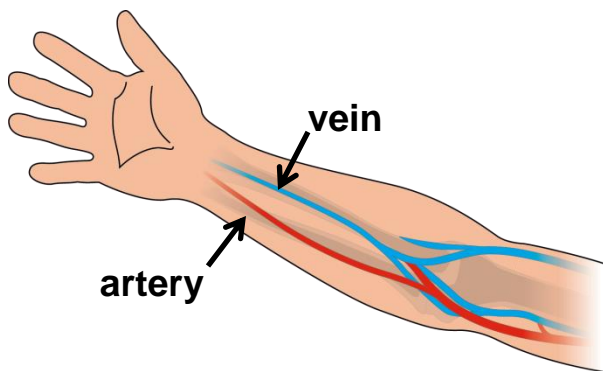
What is a fistula?

A fistula is the joining of an artery and a vein by a surgeon. The fistula is also called an 'access' because it is used to 'get to' or access the blood in your body in order to filter or clean it.

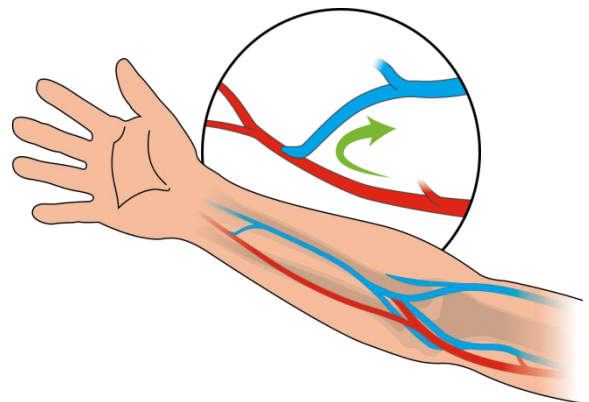
The flow of blood in an artery is much faster and stronger than the flow of blood in a vein. When the artery and vein are joined, blood from the artery causes the vein to stretch. With time the vein becomes larger, stronger and ready for dialysis.

A fistula can be made in the upper or lower arm. Your doctor decides the best place for your fistula. The procedure is done with local anaesthetic. This means that either your whole arm or just the area where the fistula is made is numbed so you do not feel the procedure.

Here is a picture of a fistula in the lower arm for example:



Before a fistula is made, blood flows through the artery and vein separately.



This picture is a close up. The arrow shows that blood flows from the artery into the vein after a fistula is made.

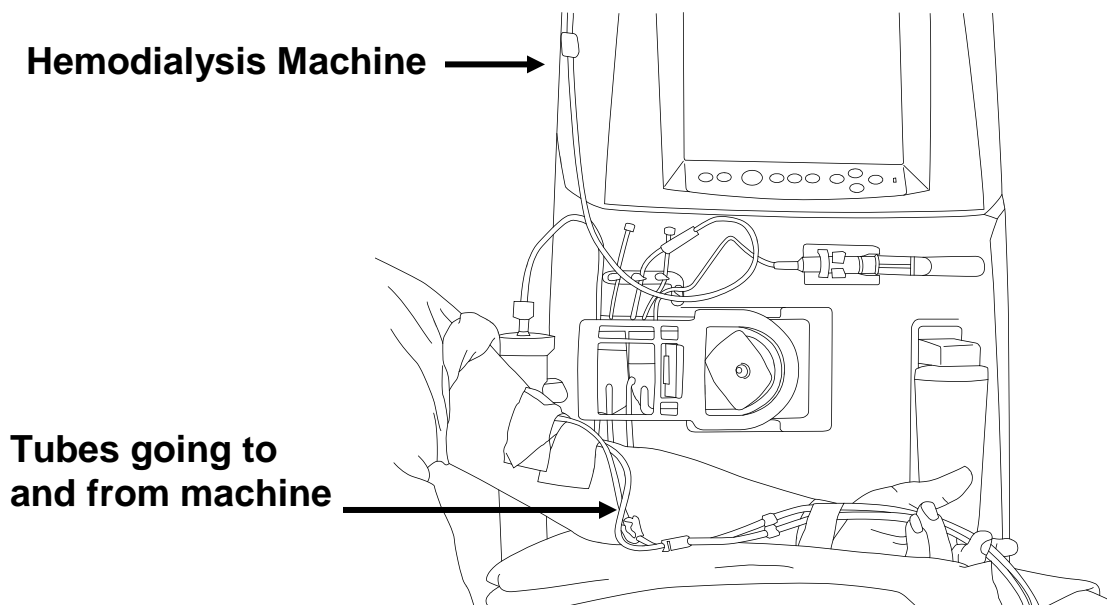
How is a fistula used?

Dialysis treatments remove waste, extra salt and water from your blood.

During hemodialysis, 2 needles are put into the fistula. They are called the arterial needle and the venous needle.

Each needle is attached to tubing. The arterial tube takes your blood to the kidney dialysis machine where it is filtered. The venous tube then brings the blood back to your body

Here is a picture. Your machine may not look the same as this and your fistula may be in another place but this gives you an idea of what to expect:



How do I care for my fistula after surgery?

Members of your dialysis care team will help you learn how to care for your fistula. When you are on dialysis, your care team will teach you how to look at, listen to and feel the fistula at every treatment session.

Swelling and/or Bruising

- It is normal to have some swelling and/or bruising in the area. To reduce swelling and/or bruising, keep your arm above the level of your waist when you can. Raise your arm on a pillow when you are sitting. Avoid keeping your arm hanging down.
- Remember to move your limb often and not stay in any position for hours at a time.
- **Do not put your arm in a sling.**

Dressing

A light dressing covers the area until the clips and/or stitches are removed when you come for your follow-up appointment in the Vascular Access Clinic. If you have stitches that dissolve, these do not get removed.

You may have a little bleeding around the incision. This is normal.

You should buy a package of gauze and paper tape to use at home. If the dressing gets dirty or comes off, cover the area with clean gauze.

Do not put tape or gauze all the way around your fistula area.

Your incision and dressing will be checked in 2 weeks when you see your surgeon or vascular access team.

If you have any concerns call the Vascular Access Clinic.

Bleeding

If you see blood soaking through the dressing, apply gentle, firm and constant pressure on the area with clean gauze. Raise your arm above your heart while you apply pressure. Do this for a full 5 to 10 minutes to stop the bleeding. 10 minutes is better.

If the bleeding does not stop or gets worse, go to the nearest Emergency Department right away. Keep firm pressure on the area and keep your arm above your heart until you get help.

Will I have pain and discomfort?

You may have some pain or discomfort. You can take plain Tylenol or 1 tablet of extra strength Tylenol every 4 hours to help. You can buy Tylenol at the drug store without a prescription.

If you are allergic to Tylenol, talk to the vascular access team.

You should have less pain each day.

If your arm does not feel better each day, call the Vascular Access Clinic.



When do the clips and/or stitches come out?

You will get a follow-up appointment at the Vascular Clinic within 2 weeks after the procedure. During this appointment, the clips and/or stitches are removed.

If you have stitches that dissolve, these are not removed.

What activities can I do?

When you first have a fistula, you may feel cautious and anxious. Over time, you will feel more comfortable with your fistula. You will be more relaxed and be able to do your usual activities without thinking about it.

Exercising the fistula begins after you have been assessed by the surgeon or vascular access team. You will get instructions on this during your follow-up appointment.

Remember:

- You may move your arm and bend your elbow when you need to.
- Do not use your fistula arm to lift heavy things.
- Avoid getting incisions wet.