
Graft for Hemodialysis – Getting Ready

What is a graft?

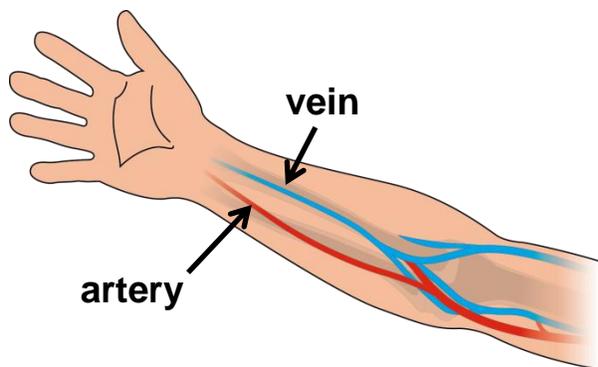
A graft is a man-made tube that is attached to an artery and a vein in your arm or leg. Your doctor decides the best place to put your graft. For example, some places include the upper arm, lower arm or thigh of a leg.

The graft is called an access. It is called an access as this is used to access the blood in your body in order to clean it.

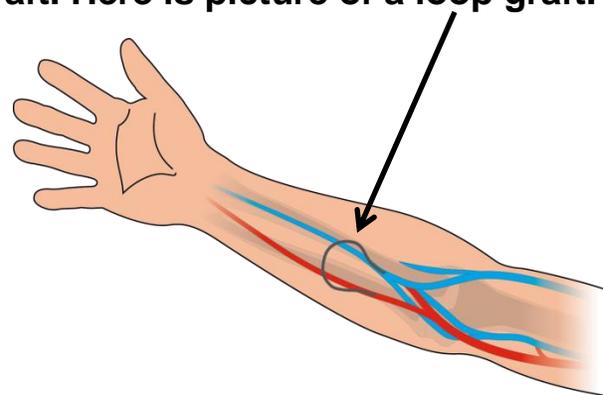
The procedure is most often done with local anesthetic. This means that either your whole arm or just the area where the graft is made is numbed so you do not feel the procedure. Sometimes the doctor decides that a person needs general anesthetic for the procedure. This means you sleep during the procedure. Your doctor will talk to you about the type of anesthetic you are having.

The doctor makes an incision in the area. The doctor then tunnels the man-made tube under your skin and joins one end to an artery and the other end to a vein. The doctor then uses clips and/or stitches to close the skin after the procedure.

There are many ways to make a graft. Here is picture of a loop graft.



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



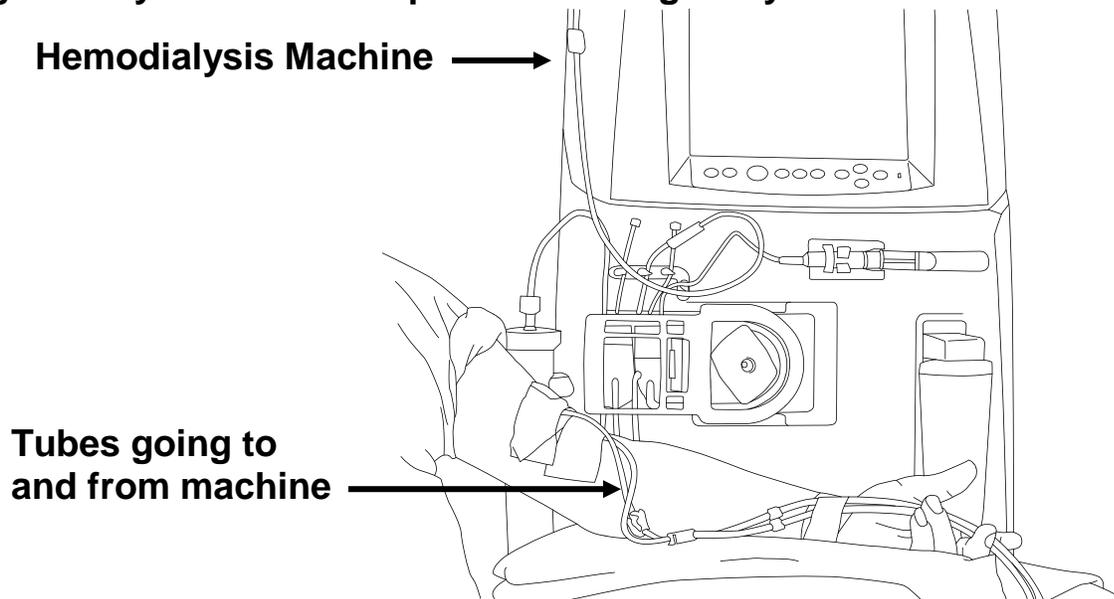
In this picture the blood flows from the artery to the vein after the graft is put in.

How is a graft used?

Dialysis treatments remove waste, extra salt and water from your blood. During hemodialysis, 2 needles are put into the graft. 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 graft may be in another place but this gives you an idea of what to expect:



How do I care for my graft?

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

Swelling and/or Bruising

- **It is normal to have mild to moderate swelling and/or bruising in the area.** To reduce swelling and/or bruising, keep your limb elevated throughout the day when you can. Remember to move your limb often and not stay in any position for hours at a time.
- If you have a graft in your arm, keep your arm above the level of your heart. Raise your arm on a pillow when you are sitting. Avoid keeping your arm hanging down for long periods of time but do move your arm and fingers often. **Do not put your arm in a sling.**

Swelling and/or Bruising continued

- If you have a graft in your leg, lay down a few times a day and elevate your leg on pillows so it is above the level of your heart. Move your legs, ankles and toes often in any position.

Dressing

A light dressing covers the area until the clips and/or stitches are removed when you come for your follow-up in the Vascular Clinic. If your surgeon uses stitches that dissolve on their own, they 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 graft 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. Raise the limb above your heart while you apply pressure. Do this for 5 to 10 full 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 the limb above your heart until you get help.

Will I have pain and discomfort?

You may have some pain and 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 your vascular access team.

You should have less pain each day.

If your arm or leg with the graft in it 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 in 1 to 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 graft, you may feel cautious and anxious. Over time, you will feel more comfortable with your graft. You will be more relaxed and able to do your usual activities without thinking about it.

Remember:

- You may move your limb and bend your elbow or knee when you need to.
- If you have a graft in your arm, do not use your graft arm to lift heavy things.
- Avoid getting incisions wet.