

# Advice after creation of an arteriovenous fistula

## Department of Renal Medicine Patient Information Leaflet

### Introduction

The information in this booklet is for people who have had an arteriovenous fistula created for haemodialysis. It describes how to look after it once it is in place, and what to do if you have any problems.

Please note that the information in this booklet is only a guide. If you need any more information or have any queries, please speak to the Renal Unit staff.

**Your fistula is your lifeline. Please look after it.**

## What happens now?

You have now had a fistula created so that you can have dialysis. We will not be able to use it straight away. It will take about eight to 12 weeks before it will be ready to use. However, it can take longer as everyone heals at different rates.

You should be seen by a renal vascular access nurse before you leave hospital after the surgery. This nurse will give you information about your fistula, and a follow up appointment to have your fistula assessed.

If for some reason you do not see the renal nurse, please contact the Renal Unit within 48 hours of leaving hospital. Ask to speak to the renal vascular access nurse to arrange a follow up.

The renal vascular access nurse will check how you are doing. They will sort out any issues to make sure that your fistula is ready for you to start your haemodialysis treatment.

## How do I care for the fistula?

Once the fistula has been put in, you will need to care for it to make sure that it works well and will last. The renal nurse will explain to you how to check and care for your fistula.

The important thing is that the buzz must be strong, meaning that the blood flow is good. The renal staff will explain more about this to you.

Here are some tips to help you look after your fistula:

### Do:

- Keep your fistula warm. This is good for circulation and it will help the fistula to mature so that it can be used for dialysis.
- Feel the buzz of the fistula as often as you can, especially before bedtime and after waking up. This will tell you how strong the blood flow is.
- Listen to the fistula by placing it next to your ear. **If you cannot hear or feel the buzz, contact the Renal Unit straight away.** The earlier you tell us, the more chance there is of it being 'rescued'.

- Wear the padded dressing that we give you after the operation for at least one week, until the renal vascular access nurse has checked your fistula. This will protect the fistula from knocks.
- Wear gloves in cold weather to keep your hand warm. This will increase circulation and will reduce the risk of your fingertips getting cold. Make sure the gloves are not tight around your wrist.
- Wear gloves when you are gardening. They will protect you from scratches and cuts which may cause an infection.
- Always use a protective leather pad or thick cloth on the fistula arm if you are working in hazardous areas.
- Carry packs of gauze dressing and a roll of tape with you at all times, just in case the fistula bleeds after a dialysis session.
- Exercise the arm that has the fistula as advised by the Renal Unit staff.
- Wear the red alert wrist band that the renal vascular access nurse will give you.
- Contact the Renal Unit if you have any questions about the fistula.

**Do not:**

- Wear tight sleeves above the fistula. This may restrict the blood flow to it. If your blood flow is restricted for a long time, it can cause the fistula to clot.
- Lift heavy objects or bags with the arm that has the fistula in it.
- Allow anyone to take blood or put needles in your fistula except Renal Unit staff.
- Allow anyone to take your blood pressure on the arm that has the fistula in it.
- Keep your arm raised above your head for long periods, for example, working on ceilings. This will reduce the blood flow to the fistula and may cause clotting.

## What exercises do I need to do?

In order to maintain a good blood flow in your newly-created fistula, it is important that you exercise the arm.

The purpose of the exercise is to increase the blood supply to that part of the arm. It is recommended that you start doing the exercise once the stitches have been removed and swelling has gone down. This can take up to 15 days.

### The exercise

The exercise can be carried out whilst sitting, standing or lying down. Please follow these instructions:

- Hold a spongy ball, the size of a tennis ball, in the fistula hand. If you have a rolled-up pair of socks, this will do.
- Allow the arm to hang in a relaxed way.
- Squeeze the ball for five or six seconds and then release the pressure until your fingers return to their normal colour.
- Repeat the exercise 10 to 15 times.

Do the exercise four to five times a day.

If the fistula becomes too painful, stop and take a break. Do not be alarmed as this can happen due to the increased blood flow in the new fistula.

If any unusual swelling appears suddenly, stop the exercise and contact the Renal Unit.

## Advice in an emergency situation

### **If the fistula flow is slower, or the buzz is weak or has stopped:**

If at any time you feel that there is a change in the fistula buzz, this may indicate that the blood flow is reduced. This is why the buzz becomes weaker.

#### What should I do?

- Call the Renal Unit immediately.
- Wrap your arm in a warm towel.
- Be prepared to come to hospital soon after the call.

### **If the fistula bleeds and the bleeding will not stop:**

- Try to stop the bleeding by wrapping your other hand around the bleeding point.
- Hold it tight and call someone for help. Ask them to contact the Renal Unit immediately.
- Try to keep calm as this will help you to think straight.

#### If no one is around:

- Dial 999 and say that you are a dialysis patient and you have a bleeding artery in your fistula arm.
- Unlock the front door for the ambulance, ready for when they arrive.
- Sit down and rest until the ambulance arrives.

If you need any advice about anything, please contact the Renal Unit.

## Contact information

### **The Renal Unit on 01384 244384**

7.30am to 8pm, Monday to Saturday

9am to 5pm, Sunday

Ask to speak to a vascular access nurse (VAN) or a member of the haemodialysis staff, if a VAN is not available.

Out of these hours, ring the hospital switchboard number and tell them you are a renal patient. Ask to speak to the haemodialysis nurse on call.

**Remember: the renal team is always willing to give help and advice. Please contact us, however small your query.**

Russells Hall Hospital switchboard number: 01384 456111

**This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:**

<http://dgft.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/renal/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email [dgft.patient.information@nhs.net](mailto:dgft.patient.information@nhs.net)

**This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.**

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Ulotka dostępna jest również w dużym druku, wersji audio lub w innym języku. W tym celu zadzwoń pod numer 0800 073 0510.

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Aceasta broșura poate fi pusă la dispoziție tipărită cu caractere mari, versiune audio sau în alte limbi, pentru acest lucru va rugăm sunați la 0800 073 0510.

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