



Fistula or graft problems: what to do

Information for patients, relatives and carers on troubleshooting fistula or graft problems.

Emergency bleed from fistula or graft

Occasionally a fistula may bleed a little after you take the plaster off at home. If this happens, apply pressure and it should stop quickly.

Although it is a very rare, you need to know what to do if your fistula or graft bleeds heavily between dialysis sessions. This is a **medical emergency**.

- **Ask for help urgently from anyone who is around.** The blood flow can be fast and make you feel faint, so do not delay in alerting others.
- **Dial 999 and report “excessive bleeding from a dialysis fistula”.**
- **Apply firm pressure over the bleeding site.** Use a milk bottle top or similar to localise pressure over the bleeding site. Always place the hollow side (inside) against your arm. See photo.
- Do not use a large absorbent dressing such as a towel. This may stop you applying enough pressure in the right place.
- If the bleeding does not stop when you press on the site, lie down and ask someone to help you hold your arm in the air above your head. Check you are pressing in the right place.
- Stay calm; bleeding does usually stop with enough pressure in the right place. Press harder if the bleeding carries on.
- If bleeding stops before help arrives, it is important that you still get your fistula checked urgently, as bleeding should not happen between dialysis sessions. Please go to hospital so a fistula surgeon can check your fistula. Also be sure to tell your dialysis unit.
- Do not look or move the bottle top to check the site. Leave it in place until a doctor or the hospital sees you.
- **While this is a rare occurrence, it is important that you and your family know how to act if it does happen.** Knowing the signs of complications and reporting these promptly means that hopefully you will not experience any emergencies with your fistula.



General fistula care

Keep the fistula clean to prevent an infection.

- Keep your arm clean at all times. Before each dialysis session, you should wash your fistula / graft arm with Octenisan cleanser and water, and dry it fully before the needles are put in.
- Do not pick at scabs from the needle sites or scratch your arm.
- If any part of your fistula or graft arm becomes sore, red or inflamed contact your renal department (or Victoria Ward out of hours) as soon as possible.

Other problems or complications associated with a fistula or graft

- Check that your fistula or graft is “buzzing” every day. This is called a ‘thrill’ or ‘bruit’ and it shows that everything is working. If you feel that it is different or faint or absent, contact your dialysis unit or Victoria Ward immediately.
- Do not let anybody take your blood pressure on your fistula or graft arm.
- Do not wear watches, bracelets or tight clothing on your fistula or graft arm.
- The fistula or graft is for dialysis only. Do not let anyone take blood from your fistula or graft. Do not let anyone give you any drugs through it.
- Do not lift heavy loads (like shopping bags) with your fistula or graft arm. Do not do weight training or similar exercise. Take care when gardening or similar activities that you do not scratch or dirty your arm.
- Be careful not to bump or cut your fistula or graft.
- If you have diarrhoea and vomiting, you may become dehydrated quite quickly, and your fistula or graft may stop working. Keep checking for the buzz. Call your unit or Victoria Ward if you are concerned.
- If your blood pressure becomes very low, your fistula or graft may stop working. If the buzz changes, call your haemodialysis unit, renal vascular access nurse or Victoria Ward.

If you have a problem or concern please call your local unit on the numbers below or the Renal Vascular Access Sister on 0118 322 8526.

Benyon Dialysis Unit:	0118 322 8360
Bracknell Dialysis Unit:	01344 662961
CAPD Unit:	0118 322 8555
Enborne Dialysis Unit:	01635 273640
Huntley & Palmer Dialysis Unit:	0118 322 8519
Kidney Care Nurses:	0118 322 7899
Transplant Nurses:	0118 322 5111
Windsor Dialysis Unit:	01753 866008

Out of hours, please contact: Victoria Ward: 0118 322 7476.

Further information

Further information can be found at the following websites:

<https://www.kidneycareuk.org/about-kidney-health/>

www.kidneypatientguide.org.uk

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

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