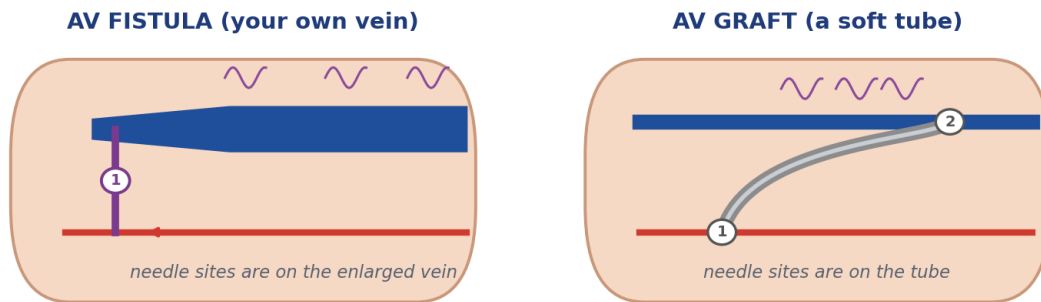


CARING FOR YOUR FISTULA OR GRAFT

Your dialysis access is your lifeline. A few minutes of daily care help protect it.



red = artery blue = vein purple waves = the "buzz" (thrill) you can feel numbers = where the artery is joined

Figure 1. A fistula (your own vein) and a graft (a soft tube) in the arm. Schematic, not to scale.

Check your access every day: Feel, Look, Listen

FEEL	LOOK	LISTEN
Rest your fingertips lightly over the access. You should feel a steady buzz (the "thrill"). A weak buzz or no buzz needs a call right away.	Check for redness, swelling, bruising, drainage, or new lumps . Note thin, shiny skin, a growing bulge, and the color of your hand and fingers.	Many people hear a soft whooshing sound near the access. A new whistle, or a sound that goes quiet, should be reported.

When: every morning, after each dialysis, after naps, and any time your arm feels different. **Always follow the instructions from your own dialysis unit and surgeon;** this sheet gives general tips.

Fistula, graft, or catheter?

Fistula: your own artery joined to your own vein; usually ready in about 2 to 3 months; lowest infection risk. **Graft:** a soft tube joins artery and vein; often ready in weeks; clots and infections are more likely.

Catheter: a tube in a neck or chest vein; temporary; highest infection risk, so keep the dressing clean and dry.

Call your dialysis unit or surgeon the same day for

- **No buzz, or a much weaker buzz** (it may be clotted; quick treatment works best).
- **Redness, warmth, swelling, pain, pus,** or fever and chills (possible infection).
- **Cold, numb, pale, or painful fingers,** or new hand weakness.
- **Swelling** of the hand or arm, a **growing bulge,** or thin, shiny skin.

Emergency: bleeding from the access

- Press firmly with clean gauze or cloth directly on the spot and keep pressing. If it does not stop within about 10 minutes, or is heavy or spurting, **call 911**. Do not drive yourself.

EVERYDAY DOS AND DON'TS

Simple habits that protect your access

Do and don't

DO	DON'T
✓ Wash the access arm with soap and water before every dialysis.	✗ No blood pressure cuffs, blood draws, IVs, or injections in the access arm.
✓ Wear loose sleeves; sleep with the arm free.	✗ No tight jewelry, watches, or bracelets on the access arm.
✓ Carry bags and purses on the other shoulder.	✗ No heavy lifting or pulling with that arm until your surgeon clears it.
✓ Tell every nurse, doctor, and dentist which arm is your access arm.	✗ Do not pick scabs or scratch over the access.
✓ Keep every dialysis session and access appointment.	✗ Do not let anyone "practice" on or poke your access.
✓ Keep needle-site bandages on only as long as your unit says.	✗ Do not skip dialysis or ignore changes in your access.

After surgery: helping a new access mature

- Keep the incision clean and dry; watch for redness, drainage, or bleeding.
- **Hand exercises** (like squeezing a soft ball) can help a fistula mature, but **only start when your surgeon says so**.
- Ask exactly how much you may lift, and for how long.

On dialysis days

- Tell staff right away if a needle hurts or the arm swells or burns.
- After the needles come out, **press firmly** on each site for as long as staff tell you. Do not peek early.
- Check your buzz when you get home and before bed. Low blood pressure or dehydration can make an access clot, so follow your fluid and medicine plan.

My access information

Access type and arm	_____	Date placed	_____
Surgeon	_____	Dialysis unit phone	_____
After-hours number	_____	Next appointment	_____