

PREPARING TO START DIALYSIS

A checklist to help you feel ready, one step at a time

Starting dialysis is a big change, and preparing ahead makes it easier. Check off each step as you go. You do not have to do everything at once. **Your care team's instructions come first.**

1 Learn your options

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| ☐ Meet with my kidney doctor (nephrologist) to learn why dialysis is needed and when. | ☐ Attend a kidney education class or talk to someone already on dialysis. |
| ☐ Ask about all choices: in-center hemodialysis, home hemodialysis, peritoneal dialysis, and conservative (non-dialysis) care. | ☐ Decide, with my team, which type of dialysis fits my life and health. |
| ☐ Ask about a kidney transplant: am I a candidate, and can I be referred now? | ☐ Visit a dialysis center, or ask for a virtual tour. |

2 Protect and plan your access

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| ☐ Ask which access is right for me: fistula, graft, or catheter (see the TLHF tip sheets). | ☐ If I am on peritoneal dialysis, ask when the belly catheter will be placed and how I will train. |
| ☐ Schedule access surgery early; a fistula can take months to be ready. | ☐ Keep all access appointments and tests (for example a vein map). |
| ☐ Protect my arm veins: ask staff not to use IVs, blood draws, or blood pressure cuffs on the arm planned for access. | ☐ Learn the warning signs and who to call (see the Access Warning Signs sheet). |

3 Insurance, money, and paperwork

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| ☐ Meet the dialysis social worker; ask about benefits and help with costs. | ☐ Ask about supplemental insurance, copays, and help with medicine costs. |
| ☐ Ask how Medicare works for kidney failure (coverage often starts in the 4th month of in-center dialysis, sooner with home training). | ☐ Ask about work leave (FMLA), disability benefits, and schedule options. |
| ☐ Gather insurance cards, ID, medication list, and medical records. | ☐ Complete an advance directive and name a health care decision-maker. |

4 Home, work, and getting to treatment

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| ☐ Plan reliable rides to treatment (usually 3 days a week) and a backup plan. | ☐ Set up a place at home for supplies if I will dialyze at home. |
| ☐ Tell my employer or school what schedule I need. | ☐ Ask my unit about its emergency plan for storms, outages, or evacuations. |
| ☐ Talk with family or friends about how they can help: rides, meals, company. | ☐ Line up help with pets, children, and chores on treatment days. |

FOOD, HEALTH, AND YOUR FIRST DAY

Finish the checklist and get ready for the first treatment

5 Food, medicines, and health

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| ☐ Meet the dialysis dietitian before changing my diet. Needs differ for potassium, phosphorus, sodium, and fluids. | ☐ Avoid NSAIDs like ibuprofen and naproxen unless my team approves. |
| ☐ Bring a full list of medicines and supplements; ask which to take before dialysis and which to hold. | ☐ Ask about my target weight, fluid limit, and blood pressure plan. |
| ☐ Ask about vaccines (for example hepatitis B, flu, COVID-19, pneumonia). | ☐ Learn tips for managing thirst and swelling between treatments. |

6 Support and feelings

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| ☐ Tell someone I trust how I am feeling. Fear, sadness, and relief are all normal. | ☐ Ask a family member or friend to come to the first visit or training. |
| ☐ Ask about counseling, and join a TLHF support group. | ☐ Make a plan for caregivers to rest and get support too. |

7 The day of my first treatment

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| ☐ Eat and drink as my unit instructs (ask about a light meal). | ☐ Bring a sweater or blanket; the room can feel cold. |
| ☐ Take or hold medicines exactly as instructed. | ☐ Bring glasses, phone, charger, headphones, a book, and a small snack if allowed. |
| ☐ Wear comfy, loose clothes; sleeves that roll up, or a front-opening top for a catheter. | ☐ Arrive a little early, and plan a ride home. |
| ☐ Bring photo ID, insurance cards, and my medicine list. | ☐ Expect the first sessions to be shorter or gentler while my body adjusts. |

Good to know

First treatments can cause tiredness, cramps, headache, or a drop in blood pressure. Tell the nurse how you feel; they can adjust. You are allowed to ask questions at every visit.

My start-of-dialysis information

First treatment	_____	Dialysis unit phone	_____
Schedule (days)	_____	Nephrologist	_____
Social worker	_____	Dietitian	_____
My ride	_____	Backup ride	_____