

ACCESS WARNING SIGNS

Know what is normal, what needs a call today, and what needs 911

This sheet covers a **fistula, graft, or catheter**. Check your access every day (feel, look, listen) and act early. Quick action can save an access, and can save a life. **Your dialysis unit's instructions come first.**

GREEN: NORMAL Keep doing your daily checks	YELLOW: CALL TODAY Call your unit or surgeon the same day	RED: CALL 911 Emergency. Do not drive yourself
● A steady buzz (thrill) over a fistula or graft. ● Mild tenderness or a small bruise at needle sites that is getting better. ● Clean, dry, stuck-down catheter dressing. ● Dry, flat scabs at needle sites that stay closed. ● Normal skin color, and a warm hand with normal feeling. ● No fever or chills. ● Dialysis runs smoothly, and you feel well before and after.	● No buzz, or a weaker or different buzz. ● Redness, warmth, swelling, pain, pus, or bad-smelling drainage at the site. ● Fever of 100.4 F (38 C) or higher, or chills (if you cannot reach your unit, go to the ER). ● Cold, numb, pale, or painful fingers; new hand weakness. ● Swelling of the hand, arm, face, or neck. ● A growing bulge, thin shiny skin, or a scab that reopens. ● Needle-site bleeding that takes longer than usual to stop. ● A wet, dirty, or loose catheter dressing; catheter looks longer or cuff shows.	● Bleeding that does not stop after about 10 minutes of firm pressure, or is heavy or spurting. ● A catheter pulled out or partly out. ● A cracked or leaking catheter, or a cap off with the clamp open. ● Sudden shortness of breath, chest pain, a racing heart, or confusion. ● Face drooping, arm weakness, or trouble speaking. ● Sudden severe pain with a cold, pale, or blue hand.

FEEL for the buzz	LOOK for redness, swelling, bulges	LISTEN for the whoosh
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Dialysis unit _____ After-hours line _____ Nephrologist _____

WHAT TO WATCH FOR, AND WHAT TO DO

Warning signs by type of access, and your action plan

By type of access

Access	Especially watch for	Why it matters
Fistula	Loss of the buzz; a bulge (aneurysm) that grows or has thin, shiny skin; arm swelling; a cold or numb hand; long bleeding after needles	A clot or narrowing can block the access; a weak bulge can rupture. Early repair often saves the fistula
Graft	Loss of the buzz; redness, warmth, pus, or fever; swelling; a cold or numb hand; skin thinning over the tube	Grafts clot and get infected more easily, and infections can spread quickly
Catheter	Fever or chills; redness or drainage at the exit site; a wet or loose dressing; neck, chest, or face swelling; any cap or clamp problem	Germs can enter the bloodstream directly. Bleeding or air can enter if it opens or comes out

Your action plan

1 STAY CALM Sit or lie down. Keep the access arm still and relaxed.	2 PROTECT IT Bleeding: press firmly with clean gauze. Catheter: clamp or pinch between the damage and your body. Do not push a catheter back in.	3 CALL Yellow sign: unit or surgeon today (after-hours line at night). Red sign: 911. Do not drive yourself.	4 TELL THE TEAM Say you are on dialysis, which access you have, and which arm. Ask them to call your dialysis unit.
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Say this in any emergency room or clinic

"I am on hemodialysis. My access is a [fistula / graft / catheter] in my [left / right] arm or chest. Please do not take blood pressure, draw blood, or start an IV in that arm. Please call my dialysis unit and nephrologist."

My emergency information card

Name	_____	Dialysis days / time	_____
Access type / side	_____	Dialysis unit phone	_____
After-hours number	_____	Nephrologist	_____
Allergies	_____	Emergency contact	_____
Medicines (on back)	_____	Blood thinners?	_____