

Hemodialysis Vascular Access

Hemodialysis cleans your blood through a fistula, graft or catheter. One of these will be a hemodialysis **LIFELINE!**

Talk with your doctor to decide which type of vascular access is best for you.

Fistula

A fistula connects right to an artery or to a vein. The vein stretches over time, which allows needles to be put in it. Fistulas are the best way to get access to the bloodstream for hemodialysis.

Pros: Permanent, beneath the skin, lasts longest (up to 20 years), provides greater blood flow for better treatment, fewer infections and other complications, fewer hospitalizations and a lower risk of dying than patients with catheters.

Cons: May not mature/develop, not possible for all patients, often cannot be used for at least 6-8 weeks.

Graft

A graft is a tube, usually made of plastic, that connects an artery to a vein. This allows needles to be put in it. Grafts are the second best way to get access to the bloodstream for hemodialysis.

Pros: Permanent, beneath the skin, may be used after 2 weeks (in some cases), may work in patients with poor veins.

Cons: Increased hospitalizations, increased risk for clotting, increased risk for serious infections, increased risk for other complications and repair procedures, does not last as long as a fistula.

Catheter

A catheter is a tube put into a vein in the neck or chest to provide vascular access for hemodialysis. The tip rests in your heart. It is most often a **temporary** access. It is the third choice for getting access to the bloodstream for hemodialysis. For some patients it is the only choice and it will need to be used as a permanent access.

Pros: Can be used right after placement.

Cons: Higher infection rates (which can be very serious or fatal), increased hospitalizations, does not last long (usually less than one year), may require longer treatment times, prolonged use may lead to inadequate dialysis, cannot shower without special appliance, high rate of clotting requiring frequent procedures, risk of destroying important veins.



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Grade Level Mean: 10
Level of Difficulty: Difficult