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Caring for your vascular access

Because your vascular access allows you to get the treatment you need, you might call it your “lifeline.” It is important to take care of it to protect your health and to make sure your access is useful for as long as possible.

- ▶ **Caring for your AV fistula or AV graft**
- ▶ **Caring for your catheter**

Caring for your AV fistula or AV graft

Because AV fistulas and grafts are under your skin, they are less likely to have problems with infection than catheters. However, they can become infected and they can have problems with blood flow. Take these steps to keep your AV fistula or graft working well:

- keep your vascular access clean at all times.
- Look for signs of infection, such as:
 - Pain
 - Redness
 - Swelling
 - Fever
- Avoid putting pressure on your access area by:
 - Not sleeping or resting on your access area
 - Not carrying bags or heavy objects across your access area
 - Not wearing tight clothes or jewelry around your access area
- For routine blood tests, ask for your blood to be taken from your other arm (whichever arm does not have your vascular access in it).

If you notice any signs of infection or any problems with any type of vascular access, contact your doctor, nurse or dialysis center right away.

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Caring for your catheter

If you have a venous or tunneled catheter, you are more likely to have problems with blood clots and infections. Here are some steps you can take to help prevent problems:

- Wash your hands before you touch any part of your catheter or your catheter incision (area on your skin where the catheter goes into your body).
- Keep the clamps on your catheter tubes closed unless the catheter is being used.
- Rinse out (flush) the catheter as often as your doctor tells you to. This can help prevent blood clots.
- Keep the area around the catheter incision clean at all times.
- Change the dressing over your catheter incision as often as your doctor tells you to.
- Do not get the area around the catheter incision wet. This means you will need to take extra caution when bathing. Ask your nurse or doctor how to bathe with a catheter.
- Look for signs of infection, such as:
 - Pain
 - Redness
 - Swelling
 - Discharge (oozing) from the incision
 - Fever

If you notice any signs of infection or any problems with any type of vascular access, contact your doctor, nurse or dialysis center right away.

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