How to Care For Your Haemodialysis Catheter
Introduction
This leaflet provides advice for patients with a dialysis catheter. You will receive individual instructions on how to care for your catheter. If you have concerns or questions please ask a doctor or nurse in the kidney unit.

What is a dialysis catheter and why do I need it?
For dialysis to work there must be a way of taking blood from you to pump it into the kidney machine and back to your bloodstream. A dialysis catheter (sometimes called a “line”) is one way of doing this and it can be used more or less straight away.

There are two main types of dialysis catheters used:

- **Temporary line** – The catheter is placed through the skin into one of the large veins in the neck or the groin at the top of the thigh. Temporary catheters are used when it is likely that a catheter will only be needed for a few days or when it is important to start dialysis quickly and plan a more permanent solution later.

- **Tunneled line** – Tunneled, cuffed catheters are also placed into a vein in your neck. In addition the catheter passes under the skin between your neck and chest wall (through a tunnel) so that it comes out of the skin just below the collarbone. Tunneled catheters are used when it is likely that a catheter will be needed for several weeks. Tunneled catheters are more comfortable and less likely to develop infection than temporary catheters.

Taking care of your dialysis catheter
Your dialysis catheter is very important and there are several things that you can do to help care for it.

- **Do not** pinch, poke, bend or pull the catheter.
- **Do not** use sharp objects, such as scissors around the catheter.
- **Do not** get the catheter wet in the shower. Apply a waterproof dressing, and try to avoid getting too much water on it.
You must telephone your dialysis unit or the renal ward immediately if you experience any of the following:

1. You develop a high temperature, chills, shivering or sweating. These are symptoms of infection, which must be treated promptly. The catheter may have to be removed and you may need to be given antibiotics.

2. Pain, redness, soreness or swelling around the exit site of the line, which may indicate infection.

3. The stitches holding the line in place break. The line will be more likely to fall out if the stitches break or become dislodged. Temporary catheter stitches remain in place until the catheter is removed. There are two sets of stitches for a tunnelled catheter. Those at the insertion site can be removed after 7-10 days. Those at the exit site from the tunnel should stay in place for 3 – 4 weeks.

4. The neck line falls out. If this happens, apply firm pressure to the exit site to stop any bleeding.

5. One of the caps comes off the end of the line. The clamp on the line must be clamped off at all times to stop blood flowing out of the line and air getting in.

Preventing infection

Any member of staff who touches the catheter must undertake strict procedures to prevent infection. Hands must be thoroughly washed and the correct equipment used (mask or face shield for patient and staff, sterile gloves, and plastic apron). **If you do not think that a member of staff is taking appropriate precautions then ask or tell them your concerns.** We discourage the use of dialysis catheters for any purpose other than dialysis treatment (for example it can only be used for taking blood or giving medication; unless there is absolutely no alternative). Anything that touches the exit site of the line and anything that goes into the line must be sterile. Your nurse can give you further advice and show you how to care for the dialysis catheter properly.
To contact us:

We hope that this information is helpful. If you have any concerns about your line or have not understood anything you have been told ask your nurse. If you are not in the hospital but need advice then you can ring us.

**Monday-Friday (except bank holidays) 9am – 5pm**, please contact one of the Renal Day Case Unit staff nurses on 0117 323 6332.

**At other times** or if the above number is unavailable, please ring the hospital switchboard on 0117 950 5050 and ask for the Renal Bleep Holder on bleep 9137.
References


Angell-Barrick N, Cornall A. What I tell my patients about temporary neckline access for haemodialysis. BJRM 2007; Vol. 12 No. 2.


NHS Constitution. Information on your rights and responsibilities. Available at www.nhs.uk/aboutnhs/constitution
If you or the individual you are caring for need support reading this leaflet please ask a member of staff for advice.

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