Dialysis catheter
Information for patients and their families

This information will help you understand and care for your dialysis catheter. It is important to follow these instructions to maintain the health of the catheter.

Infection is our greatest concern and if these simple guidelines are followed, the risk of infection will be minimised.

About the dialysis catheter

The dialysis catheter is an external soft plastic tube usually placed under the skin into a neck or chest vein. It may also be called a permacath. It has two adapters or ports, one port for removing your blood and the other for returning the cleaned blood to your body.

The catheter allows a patient to have dialysis immediately. It can be used for a period that varies from weeks to months. The procedure to insert your catheter will usually take 45 minutes and is performed in theatre. Dialysis catheters are prone to infection and clotting. The permacath is used as a substitute access until an arteriovenous fistula can be created.

Double-lummen cuffed hemodialysis catheter
What to expect after the insertion

• The catheter will not be visible when wearing a shirt.

• Some pain, slight bruising and swelling are normal on both your chest and neck.

• If the pain, swelling or bruising gets worse over the next few days please contact the renal team or attend the nearest Emergency Department after hours. If you are seriously concerned - contact 000.

• You may have two small dressings; one on your neck and one on your chest. The catheter will be secured by some small stitches.

• A small amount of blood or drainage (exudate) on your dressing is normal. If the dressing is soaked with blood please contact the renal team or attend the emergency department after hours. Apply gentle pressure to the area while waiting for medical attention.

• Keep the area dry and do not remove the dressing.

• If you are suffering from fevers or are feeling unwell contact your renal team immediately or the nearest Emergency Department after hours.

• Keep the area clean and dry and ensure anyone using your dialysis catheter wears sterile gloves and cleans the catheter every time.

• A nurse in the dialysis unit will change the dressing once a week or when soiled.

• The catheter is to be used solely for dialysis. Do not allow it to be used for any other purpose.

• Check for redness, tenderness or swelling and notify renal staff of any changes.

• You must not swim or shower with a dialysis catheter in place. It is okay to take a bath as long as you don’t get the dressing wet. This is very important because bacteria like moist, wet environments which can lead to a serious infection at the site or in your blood stream.

• There are caps and clamps on both ports. The clamps should always remain closed and the caps in place when the catheter is not being used. If a cap falls off contact your renal team or emergency department immediately. Please do not tamper with your catheter at any time.

• If you are concerned with your dialysis catheter contact your renal team or emergency department.