



Information for patients  
and carers

# CARING FOR YOUR ARTERIOVENOUS FISTULA

## Key points

In the first two weeks following surgery:

- If you are not on dialysis and you have had a fistula created the renal vascular access team will contact you to arrange a 7 – 14 day post-operative review of your fistula at Preston.
- Bubble wrap and any small circular plaster (GTN patch) should be removed 24 hours after surgery.
- The wound is usually glued together. You will be told by your surgeon if stitches have been used.
- It is important to keep the wound site clean and dry to prevent you developing a wound infection.
- The dressing over the operation site should remain in place for at least 7 days. The wound should then be reviewed on the ward if you are an in-patient or on the dialysis unit if you have haemodialysis, by the practice nurse at your GP surgery or sometimes a district nurse will be arranged.
- Once the wound has healed and any stitches removed bath or shower as normal.
- If you notice any swelling in your hand and/or arm rest the arm on a pillow so it is at the height of your chest, but take care not to compress the fistula when doing so.
- It is normal for some bruising to develop. This should disappear after a few weeks.
- Avoid driving until the wound has completely healed. Please ask the surgeon if unsure.
- Depending on the complexity of the surgery it will be 1 to 2 weeks before you can return to work; longer if there are complications. Please ask the surgeon.

## Complications

- Always check the fistula is working each day by feeling for the “buzz” (thrill) or listening for the whooshing sound (bruit) if you have been issued with a stethoscope. Contact the renal dialysis unit in Preston if there is any change.
- At the first signs of infection such as redness, swelling, inflammation or pain, contact the renal dialysis unit in Preston immediately.
- If your fingers/hand, on the same side as the fistula becomes numb, cold, white/purple or painful, contact the renal dialysis unit at Preston.
- In the unlikely event of bleeding, APPLY PRESSURE over the area and contact the renal dialysis unit in Preston.

## Vein training exercises

The following exercise will help to strengthen the newly formed vessel. You should start the exercise once the wound has healed and should continue the exercises for up to 3 months after your operation.

Hold a soft ball (e.g. tennis ball or firm sponge) in the hand of your fistula arm. Squeeze and release the ball 20 times rhythmically. During the exercise keep your forearm and hand lower than your chest. Repeat these exercises 10 times daily.

## Key Points for the routine care of your fistula

- Complete a daily fistula check by feeling for the buzz and/or listening for a whooshing sound with a stethoscope. Report any changes to your Specialist nurse.
- Wear a warning wrist band. These can be obtained via your dialysis unit or Renal Vascular Access Specialist Nurses.
- Cover your arm whilst gardening to prevent germs entering the fistula through the skin.
- The fistula will stop working if you become dehydrated. Be extra vigilant with your daily fistula check during hot weather, if you have diarrhoea, vomiting or fever.

All of the following can cause restriction to the blood flow and in turn may cause the blood to stop flowing through the blood vessel. You will then require either treatment to try and restart the blood flow or another operation to create a fistula. Therefore it is important you:

- Avoid having bloods taken or needles inserted into your fistula arm.
- Avoid having blood pressure taken on your fistula arm.
- Avoid lifting or carrying heavy items on the fistula arm.
- Avoid wearing tight clothing around your fistula.
- Seek advice before taking part in contact sports from renal staff.
- Avoid wearing a wrist watch or bracelets on your fistula arm.
- Avoid lying on your fistula arm if at all possible.

## In the event of out of hospital severe bleeding

- Life threatening bleeds are extremely rare and usually only relevant to patients on dialysis.
- For any bleeding that soaks through a dressing despite direct pressure, dial 999 immediately.
- The priority in this situation is to get help and this should not be delayed whilst trying to stop the bleeding as loss of consciousness can occur quickly.
- The priority is to stop the bleeding, not preserve the fistula or graft function.
- Continue to apply direct pressure while waiting for the ambulance.
- If available, a small, flat, rigid object (e.g. inverted large bottle top) can be used to apply pressure over the bleeding site. This is to localise pressure to the bleeding point.
- Do not use large absorbent items, such as a towel, as this disperses pressure reducing its effectiveness.
- Contact RPH dialysis unit / ward 25 particularly when medical attention has been given at another centre.

## Contact details

For general advice, including returning to work, contact the kidney choices team on 01772 522902 or via the switchboard on 01772 716565 and ask the operator to bleep 2755.

If you think the wound is infected or the fistula has stopped working you should contact the renal vascular access team (Monday to Friday 8.00am to 3.00pm) at Preston on 01772 524464 or via the switchboard on 01772 716565 and ask them to bleep 2534 or 3716.

Alternatively, call the renal dialysis unit at Preston between the hours of 8.00am – 8.00pm Monday to Saturday 01772 522520 or 01772 522739.

For all other times, contact the renal ward 25 at Royal Preston on 01772 522522.

Transport can be arranged on 08000 323240.

## Sources of further information

The UK Renal Registry NHS Programme - <https://www.thinkkidneys.nhs.uk/>

The British Renal Society - <https://britishrenal.org/news/brs-vasbi-needling-recommendations/>

[www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk](http://www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk)

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

[www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk)

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/patient-choice/>

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Please ask if you would like help in understanding this information. This information can be made available in large print and in other languages.

**Cantonese:**

如果你希望以另外一種格式接收該資訊，請和我們聯絡，不必猶豫。

**Gujarati:**

જો તમને આ માહિતી બીજી રચના કે ફોર્મેટમાં મેળવવાની ઈચ્છા હોય, તો કૃપા કરી અમારો સંપર્ક કરતા અચકાશો નહિ.

**Hungarian:**

Kérjük, vegye fel velünk a kapcsolatot, ha más formában kéri ezt az információt.

**Polish:**

Jeżeli chciał(a)by Pan/Pani otrzymać niniejsze informacje w innym formacie, prosimy o kontakt.

**Punjabi:**

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਫਾਰਮੈਟ ਵਿਚ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਲੈਣਾ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ ਤਾਂ ਸਾਡੇ ਨਾਲ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰਨ ਤੋਂ ਨਾ ਝਿਜਕੋ।

**Urdu:**

اگر آپ اس معلومات کو کسی اور صورت میں حاصل کرنا چاہتے ہیں تو برائے مہربانی ہم سے رابطہ کرنے میں ہچکچاہٹ محسوس نہ کریں۔

**Lancashire Teaching Hospitals is a smoke-free site**

On 31 May 2017 Lancashire Teaching Hospitals became a smoke-free organisation. From that date smoking is not permitted anywhere on any of our premises, either inside or outside the buildings. Our staff will ask you about your smoking status when you come to hospital and will offer you support and advice about stopping smoking including Nicotine Replacement Therapy to help manage your symptoms of withdrawal.

If you want to stop smoking you can also contact the Quit Squad Freephone 0800 328 6297.

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