



# Kidney Q&A

0-3 months

Life Options Rehabilitation Program  
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## Q: How can I protect my vascular access?

**A:** Your dialysis access is your lifeline. There are about 10 sites on your body where you can have an access. If you run out of sites, you will need to do peritoneal dialysis or have a kidney transplant to live.

What kind of access do you have?

- You have a **fistula** if a surgeon sewed your vein to your artery. A fistula is the best kind of access, because it is made only of your own tissue and can last for many years.
- You have a **graft** if a surgeon sewed a piece of artificial vein to your own vein and artery. A graft is more likely to get infected or clotted than a fistula. A graft will also need more “tune-ups” to keep it working.
- You have a **catheter** if a doctor put a plastic tube into a central vein in your neck, chest, or groin. Catheters tend to get infected, and need close watching. Research shows that having a fistula or a graft for dialysis can help you live longer than a catheter.

**What I can do to keep my fistula or graft healthy:**

- Look at it every day to be sure it is not red or swollen.
- Feel it every day to be sure there is a strong, buzzing pulse.

- Listen to it every day to be sure it sounds the same.
- Keep it clean and dry.
- Don't allow blood pressure measures or blood draws on my access arm.
- Use my fistula or graft for dialysis only.
- Avoid squeezing my access with tight clothes or jewelry.
- Be sure staff wash their hands and wear clean gloves to touch my access.
- Ask for a staff person who has a good track record with my access to put my needles in.
- Learn where the needles should go at each treatment.
- Learn how to put in my own needles.
- Visit module 8 of Kidney School™: *Vascular Access: A Lifeline for Dialysis* at [www.kidneyschool.org](http://www.kidneyschool.org) to learn more.
- Visit [www.fistulafirst.org](http://www.fistulafirst.org) and click patients to find many resources about vascular access.

## Q: How can I protect my vascular access?

### What I can do to keep my catheter healthy:

- Keep my catheter clean and dry at all times.
- Follow my doctor's orders for bathing or showering with a catheter.
- Be sure staff wash their hands and wear clean gloves to touch my catheter.
- Do not let anyone use a scissors to change my catheter dressing.
- Call my center right away if my catheter falls out or the caps come off.
- Call my center right away if I feel pain or swelling around the catheter.
- Use my catheter for dialysis only.
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