

# My Choices: Self-Cannulation



If you have chosen Hemodialysis to treat your kidney failure, you will also need to decide which type of vascular access to use. A vascular access is a “lifeline” for Hemodialysis. It provides a way to reach your blood so it can go to the artificial kidney (dialyzer) to be cleaned. There are three kinds of access: fistulas, grafts and catheters. When they can be used, arteriovenous (AV) fistulas are the best choice. AV fistulas can last for years and tend to have the fewest problems.

## Why Is It Important?

Self-cannulation has been shown to lessen problems and lengthen the life of your access (arteriovenous fistula). Your fistula will last longest if only one person puts your needles in. YOU are the only one who is there for each treatment. Learning to put in your own needles gives you control and can reduce your anxiety regarding needle insertions, infiltrations and infections. It can also prepare you for home hemodialysis.

## Where Do I Start?

Tell your clinic staff that you want to learn how to put in your own needles. You are not alone; the clinic staff will teach you how to safely self-cannulate (put in your own needles). The buttonhole technique is one way to self-cannulate. The “buttonhole technique” uses just one spot for each needle, over and over, at the same angle. This makes a track like a pierced earring hole. It’s easy to learn and do, and just about pain free.

## Common Tests

The clinic staff will teach you how to put together the supplies needed for cannulation.

- A clean, protective pad to put under the access
- Two needles, the size approved by your doctor
- Tourniquet (either Velcro™ or latex)
- Scissor clamp (if using a tourniquet without Velcro™)
- Two pairs of clean gloves (for needle insertion and removal)
- Antimicrobial for cleaning your access (70% povidone iodine, 2% chlorhexidine, or alcohol)
- Normal saline
- Heparin (per your doctor’s order)
- Paper or plastic tape
- Gauze for needle removal
- Band-aids
- Sharps container for needle removal

## My Questions

### Ask your Care Team:

- When can I learn self-cannulation?
- Who will train me how to self-cannulate?
- Is there something I can do to increase my chances of self-cannulation?

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