



Heartland Kidney Network

We're Here For You.

# MY CHOICES: WHAT I SHOULD KNOW ABOUT FISTULAS

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 A FISTULA IS THE BEST ACCESS FOR ME

- Allows high blood flow rates during dialysis for better results
- Less chance for infections
- Fewer trips to the hospital
- Usually last longer than other access types
- Improved quality of life

## COMMON TESTS

In determining if a fistula is an option for you, your doctor will order some tests to search for suitable vessels that may be too deep to be identified on physical exam. Tests may include:

- Vessel Mapping
- Duplex Ultrasound
- Doppler
- Angiography (x-ray of blood vessels)

## NEW FISTULA

After you and your doctor have decided to get a fistula and the new fistula is placed, your doctor will check it and let you know when it is ready to be used. Your fistula will take a number of weeks to mature; during this time, exercising your arm may encourage your fistula’s development and maturity. There are also some things you will always need to look and feel for.

If you notice any of the following notify your nurse and doctor.

## LOOK

- Redness
- Swelling
- Drainage
- New bulging

## FEEL

- Warmth at fistula site
- Pain when touching fistula site
- Thrill – a buzzing sensation
- Fever
- Cold or numb fingers

## LISTEN

- (Done by your renal team)
- Bruit – a buzzing sound heard with a stethoscope

## PROBLEMS THAT MAY REQUIRE MEDICAL ATTENTION

### Early problems

- Immediate thrombosis (clot)
- Non-maturation
- Mature, but is deep and unusable
- Aneurysm (widening or dilatation of a blood vessel)
- Steal syndrome
- Fistula degeneration (deterioration)

### Late problems

- Stenosis (narrowing of your fistula)
- Thrombosis (formation or presence of a clot)
- Clotting

For more information or to file a grievance please contact the Heartland Kidney Network at: Heartland Kidney Network • 7306 NW Tiffany Springs Pkwy. • Suite 230 • Kansas City, MO 64153  
Toll-Free Patient Line: (800) 444-9965 • net12@nw12.esrd.net • www.heartlandkidney.org

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## MY QUESTIONS

**Ask your Care Team:** What exercises do I need to do to help mature my fistula? What other things can I do to keep my fistula safe and long lasting? What other “My Pages” can I look at to learn more?

Source: [www. Fistulfirst.org](http://www.Fistulfirst.org)