



My Choices: Self-Cannulation

Once you've chosen Hemodialysis as a treatment, 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 extend the life of your AV fistula. Your fistula will last longer 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, similar to a pierced earring hole. It's easy to learn and do, and just about pain free.

Will I Be Able to Cannulate Myself?

Practice with your technician or nurse to see if you can do the following steps before you decide to learn how to cannulate your own access:

1. Leave the cover on the sharp end of the needle
2. Check to see if you can hold the needle wings with the hand opposite of your access arm
3. Are you able to reach your access with your hand when holding the needle?
4. Check to see if you can reach both needle sites
5. Make sure needle tips are at least two inches apart. This step is important to make sure your blood gets cleaned well enough.
6. Are you able to hold your own needle sites after your treatment is finished?
7. Even if you become skilled at cannulating yourself, you might need some help removing the needles after treatment.

Remember, you must always wash your access before starting treatment. And you must wear gloves and learn how to properly clean your access before inserting needles.

What Supplies Do I Need?

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™)



Antimicrobial for cleaning your access (70% povidone iodine, 2% chlorhexidine, or alcohol)



Two pairs of clean gloves (for needle insertion and removal)



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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