



Quality  
Insights  
Renal Network 3

Serving New Jersey, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands



## **Straight Talk About Your Hemodialysis Catheter and Infections**

If you use a catheter for hemodialysis, your dialysis staff and kidney doctor have probably advised you to change to a fistula or graft. They may have told you that the fistula and graft are safer for you and last longer than a catheter. They are right. The dangers of hemodialysis catheters are well known and include serious complications such as blood stream and heart infections.

*If you must rely on a catheter permanently it is usually because:*

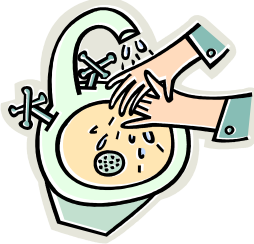
- You are one of the few who cannot have an AV Fistula or AV Graft
- OR**
- You are waiting for your AV Fistula or Graft to be ready to use.

In either case, you should be aware of several ways to protect yourself from infections and complications. The following are things to remember at dialysis and at home:



1. You and your caretaker should wear masks to cover the nose and mouth for dressing changes and when your catheter is being connected or disconnected from the dialysis machine. This is to avoid introducing germs from the mouth or nose into your catheter when the caps are removed or on the opening where the catheter enters your body. Germs can be introduced by breathing, coughing or sneezing.

2. Hand washing or use of alcohol cleanser is necessary before gloves are put on to care for your catheter. It is OK to ask your caregiver if he/she has cleaned hands before touching you or your catheter with gloved hands. Routinely wash your own hands after touching people, food and other things.



3. Keep your catheter dressing clean and dry. Look at your dressing every day to make sure there is no leakage. Caps should remain on the tubing ends and the clamps on each line should be closed. Do not use anything sharp around the catheter such as pins or scissors.



4. Ask your nurse about your clinic's catheter dressing policy and to teach you what to do if the dressing becomes soiled or wet; or if the caps or clamps loosen or fall off. Call your dialysis clinic if you notice anything wrong with the catheter or you experience unusual soreness or symptoms such as chills or fever.



5. If there is leakage of blood from the lines, there may be a hole or opening in the tubing, a faulty clamp or a loose or missing cap. This can be life-threatening. You may need to call 911 and know how to close an open clamp or pinch the tubing closed above a hole if the clamp is broken. Ask your nurse for instructions about catheter emergencies **before** you have one.



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