

DIALYSIS
SAFETY

Keeping Kidney Patients Safe

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Dialysis Safety: What Patients Need To Know

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Patient safety is the top concern of the entire dialysis center's staff. Safety increases when patients are involved in their own care, helping to prevent medical errors. The more you know and understand about your own treatment, the safer you will be.

Many systems are in place to keep patients safe. Your health care team follows step-by-step directions during treatment and throughout the day in the dialysis unit. We are all human, though, so mistakes can happen.

This brochure gives you ideas for talking to your health care team, basic information about six key areas where mistakes can be prevented, and tips for keeping yourself safe at each visit to the dialysis facility.

Be Involved!

The first step to keeping yourself safe is to know as much as possible about your own care. Be sure you do the following:

- ✓ Make a list of your daily medications, doses, and the reason you take each. Have your doctor read through it to be sure it is correct.
- ✓ Bring your medication list to every treatment.
- ✓ Be aware of any general health changes in between treatments. Keep notes that you bring to treatment. Tell staff about any changes.
- ✓ Write down information specific to your treatment: dialyzer solution your doctor has prescribed, and medications you receive before, during, or after treatment, etc.
- ✓ Be aware of the routines the staff follows.
- ✓ Know your body and be honest about how you are feeling. Talk to your health care team if you are not feeling right.
- ✓ Speak up for safety! Remember, you are a part of the team keeping yourself, and perhaps other patients, safe. If you see or hear something that doesn't seem right, talk to the staff.
- ✓ Bring a friend or family member to the beginning and end of treatment, if possible, or ask staff about patient advocates. They can help you keep track of treatment details and help you talk to your health care team.

Talking to Your Health Care Team

Your health care team depends on constant communication to help keep you safe. That includes communication to and from nurses, technicians, dietitians, doctors—and each patient.

Talking to doctors, nurses and other staff is not easy for many people. Patients may find it difficult to question what your medical team is doing or saying. But your safety depends on you being able to speak with them. There are examples of what to say about specific safety issues below.

In general, keep a few tips in mind:

- ✓ Make eye contact and keep a pleasant and respectful tone.
- ✓ If you do not understand something, ask the person to explain it a different way. It's OK to ask more than once! The goal is for you to understand your treatment, and the staff is responsible to help you understand.
- ✓ Repeat the doctor or nurse's answer to a question to be sure you know what they meant.
- ✓ Try to approach a conversation about a problem calmly.
- ✓ A friend, family member, or patient advocate can help you, especially at times when you are frustrated.
- ✓ Remember, you have the right to the information about your care!

Know the 6 Safety Points!

There are six key events that staff must focus on to prevent errors. Patients, family members or friends who may go to treatment with them also should understand these six items.

1. Clean Hands

Why? Germs, including infections, are spread by touch. The staff has specific ways to break that chain of infection—using gloves, washing hands with soap and water, and using a germ-killing gel or foam.

What should I look for? Everyone on the health care team should clean their hands after removing gloves or touching any surfaces or other people. If hands are soiled, they should be cleaned with soap and water. Staff may also use a sanitizer—a gel or foam rub—to kill germs before they can spread.

What should I say or do? If you notice that someone hasn't cleaned their hands, say: *"I don't mean any disrespect, but would you please clean your hands?"* If the problem continues, ask to see the nurse manager immediately. Say, *"Stop. I need to speak with the nurse manager immediately."*

2. Correct Dialyzer, Dialyzing Solution

Why? Using the wrong solution or dialyzer can be very harmful. If you reuse your dialyzer, it must be cleaned and disinfected after treatment and tested before the next use. Your doctor will identify a specific solution for you, based on how you have responded to treatment and other factors. Having the correct dialyzer solution is critical.

What should I look for? If your dialysis center reuses dialyzers, be sure the technician has your dialyzer (labeled with your name) and that it has been cleaned and tested to be sure that it's working properly. The label on the dialyzing solution should match what your doctor has prescribed; you should have that information in writing from your nurse or doctor.

What should I say or do? Always speak to the technician before treatment begins. Ask, "May I see the label on the dialyzer to be sure it is mine?" This should never be refused. "Have you cleaned and tested my dialyzer? Is it working properly?" If the answer is not a clear "yes," say "Do not use that dialyzer until it is tested and definitely working", or ask for a new one. Always make sure that the correct solution is being used. Say, "May I read the label on the dialyzing solution?" Compare it to your written notes. If it doesn't seem correct, say "I don't think that's right. Please check with the nurse."

3. Correct Medications

Why? There are four possible medication errors: getting the wrong medication, getting your medication at the wrong time, not getting one of your medications, and getting the wrong dose of your medication. Any can be very harmful to you.

What should I look for? Again, the more familiar you are with the details of your own care, the better. If you notice that you're not being given a medication, or if something doesn't seem right at any point, interrupt the staff!

What should I say or do? If you have your list of medications with you, ask to compare the medications being given to your own list. Say, "May I see that label so that I'm sure of what you're giving me?" If there is a new medication, or one not already on your list, say "That medication is not on my list. What is it for? Please double-check with the nurse manager [or doctor] before you give it to me."

4. Following Routines

Why? Dialysis centers set up very specific routines, or procedures, to be sure that any staff treating you follows the same steps for every part of your treatment. Those routines help prevent errors and keep you safe. There are routines for everything in the center—from cleaning spills safely, to needle insertions, basic medical checks before and after treatment, dialyzer set-up, and many others.

What should I look for? You probably know most of the routines for your specific care. Watch and listen for anything that seems out of the ordinary.

What should I say or do? If someone seems to have skipped a step in the routine, or if something is being done differently, speak up immediately! Never hesitate to question anything about your treatment and your safety as a patient. For example, say, "I'm not sure you set up my dialyzer the same way as usual. Can you please double-check?" or "Please change your gloves. I saw that you just cleaned a spill", or "Nobody checked my blood pressure yet. Can you please tell me who is going to do it?"

5. Fall Prevention

Why? Dialysis patients may fall for many reasons. Medications may cause dizziness. Changes in blood pressure can make you feel light-headed or faint. You can trip on equipment like oxygen tubing, catheters, walkers or wheelchairs.

What should I look for? Be aware of how you are feeling. You must be honest about how you are feeling, no matter how quickly you want or need to get home, or to work, or somewhere else! Also, look carefully around you as you walk through the dialysis unit so that you don't trip.

What should I say or do? Before dialysis begins, tell your nurse if you have fallen since your last treatment. If nobody asks specifically, tell your nurse, “*Before we get started, I want you to know that I fell since my last treatment.*” Give as many details as possible—when you fell, if you were hurt or bruised, etc. During or after treatment, tell your nurse or technician if you feel unsteady. Say, “*I feel faint*”, “*I feel dizzy*”, or “*My balance is off*”.

6. Preventing Needle Dislodgment

Why? Having the needle that is delivering the cleansed blood back into your body come partially or completely out of your access site can be very dangerous. Your dialysis center should have a standard procedure for taping needles and blood lines. If the needle has to be repositioned, all taping should be replaced.

What should I look for? The area surrounding your vascular access should be carefully washed and dried prior to cannulation and your fistula or access site inspected for sores, thinning or bulging. Blood lines should be looped loosely enough to enable you to move without pulling out the needle, but not so loose as to catch on a nearby object and become dislodged. The access area should always remain uncovered.

What should I say or do? Always tell your caregiver about your fistula to be sure no one grabs your fistula arm. If your fistula or access starts to bleed, let staff know immediately. If your needle has been repositioned, but not re-taped, say “please re-tape this.” Or if you notice your needle and blood lines are not taped in the usual manner or don’t seem correct, say, “Have you changed the taping procedure? Can you double check?” If you become too ill to hold your arms still during the entire dialysis session, make sure a family member or friend stays with you during treatment.

Keep Yourself Safe

Remember, you are an important set of eyes and ears to help the dialysis staff prevent errors that could affect your safety and that of other patients. Learn as much as possible about your own care and the dialysis staff’s routines, and be an active participant in your care and safety!



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Additional Resources for Patients



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