

Removing your temporary haemodialysis catheter (vascath)



Working together for better patient information

If you are receiving haemodialysis for chronic kidney disease (CKD), you may have had a catheter or line put into the large veins in your groin or neck. This will have helped your healthcare team access your veins for dialysis. This catheter, known as a vascath, is intended for short-term use, usually one to four weeks. In comparison, long-term tunnelled catheters or permacaths can stay in place for much longer periods.

This leaflet describes what happens when your temporary haemodialysis catheter is removed. Your healthcare team will be happy to answer any further questions you have.





Do I have to have the haemodialysis catheter removed?

Your haemodialysis catheter is only intended for short-term use and may cause problems if it is left in for too long. Your kidney team will explain why your catheter needs to be removed. This could be because:

- Your vascath is damaged
- It is no longer needed
- It is not working well
- It is carrying an infection, or is at risk of causing an infection

What will happen before my haemodialysis catheter is removed?

Your healthcare team will check your recent blood test results to make sure that your blood clots normally. If possible, your haemodialysis catheter should not be removed if you have recently had any blood thinning injections or medicines.

Do not stop any medications unless advised to by your healthcare team.

How will my haemodialysis catheter be removed?

The procedure will take place in hospital. You will not need any anaesthetic and you will be awake during the procedure.

You will be asked to lie on your back. If your haemodialysis catheter is in your neck, you may be asked to lie flat, or with your head slightly below the level of your feet. Your kidney team will make sure you are lying comfortably before your haemodialysis catheter is removed.

The nurse or doctor will clean their hands and clean the area around where your catheter is. Any stitches holding your catheter in place will be taken out.

The healthcare team will pull out the catheter and press firmly on the area. They will keep pressing until they are happy the hole made by the catheter is closed and until any bleeding has stopped. They will then place a dressing over the area to keep it clean.





What will happen after the catheter is removed?

Once the haemodialysis catheter is out, you will be asked to stay lying flat on the bed for at least two hours, to reduce the risk of any bleeding starting again.

During this time your healthcare team will keep checking on you and examine the dressing to make sure there is no ongoing bleeding. They will also check your blood pressure and pulse regularly. If you notice any bleeding or your breathing becomes more difficult, it is important that you tell the nurse or doctor immediately.

If your healthcare team are happy that everything is okay after around two hours, you will be allowed to get up and move about. You should keep the dressing on for two days and the area should be kept clean and dry. Your healthcare team will give you some clean dressings in case the first one becomes loose or gets wet.

Your healthcare team will tell you when you are able to restart medications that may make you more prone to bleeding. This may be the same day, or the following day.

You should avoid heavy lifting, strenuous exercise or contact sports for a few days after your haemodialysis catheter has been removed. This is to prevent any bleeding. Gentle walking is fine, but you should not over exert yourself.

Are there any risks associated with removing a temporary haemodialysis catheter?

All medical and surgical procedures can cause complications, even though every effort is made to prevent them. Although removing a vascath does not usually cause any problems, there are some risks associated with it. Your healthcare team will monitor you closely for any problems after your catheter has been removed.

- It is normal to have some **mild discomfort and bruising** in the days after your catheter is removed. Painkillers such as paracetamol are usually enough to help.
- Risk of **infection** where the catheter was removed. Signs of infection include redness, swelling and pain. You may also see pus and you may feel feverish.

If you notice any of these symptoms it is vital that you seek medical help quickly, either through your healthcare team, GP or the Accident & Emergency department at your local hospital. It is important to tell them that you have recently had a haemodialysis catheter removed.



- Risk of **bleeding**. A small amount of blood may be seen through the dressing after the procedure. **If there is a larger amount of blood it is important to act quickly as this can be very serious and life-threatening**. Sometimes the bleeding is internal and cannot be seen. If you see bruising spreading around the site where the catheter was removed, or you suddenly begin to feel lightheaded when sitting or standing, you should seek urgent medical advice.
- Risk of **air embolism**. This occurs when air accidentally enters the large vein through the hole where the haemodialysis catheter was placed. This air can travel to your heart or lungs and stop blood from getting through. This is rare, but very serious, and can be life-threatening. Your medical team will reduce the chances of this happening by making sure that you are lying down flat when your haemodialysis catheter is removed.



If your wound is bleeding after you have returned home:

1. Call for help from a friend, family member or neighbour if possible.
2. Put firm pressure on the wound and don't take it off for at least five minutes and until the bleeding has stopped. This also reduces the risk of air embolism.
3. Seek urgent medical advice (you may need to call 999).

Where can I find out more information?

- Kidney Care UK:
www.kidneycareuk.org/about-kidney-health/treatments/dialysis/
- NHS Choices: Dialysis -
www.nhs.uk/conditions/dialysis






Contact us



In partnership with



UK Kidney Association

 www.kidneycareuk.org
 info@kidneycareuk.org
 01420 541 424

Publication date 09/2023
Review date 09/2026

© Kidney Care UK. Kidney Care UK is charitable company limited by guarantee. Registered in England and Wales (1228114). A charity registered in England and Wales (270288) and Scotland (SCO48198). KC49.



Please share
your feedback