

Big D and Me - Briefing # 1

Healthy dialysis techniques for people whose kidneys have let them down



Starting Dialysis ~

Things You Wanted to Know But Were Afraid to Ask

For some people, the need for dialysis comes as no surprise; their kidneys have been slowly failing and their doctor has prepared them for months or even years. As a result, they are ready, but they have a real dread of dialysis.

For those whose kidney failure is quick and unexpected, the shock of needing dialysis on top of the trauma of kidney failure is a double whammy.

Friends and family don't usually know much about dialysis, except that it's a bummer, involving needles, machines and lots of time out of your life. All of these things are true; not many people who would dialyse if they didn't have to. But it's also true that dialysis gives you the rest of your life back, to live the way you want to.

So, you are soon to start dialysis and you have some questions.

Hi. I'm Greg Collette. I've been on dialysis off and on for 18 years. Four years ago I started a blog - BigDandMe - to share my experiences and create a community to help each other through the challenges of dialysis. Probably the most common questions people ask are about starting dialysis.

Here are some plain English answers from someone who's been where you are now.

Will I die?

No. These days, kidney failure is not fatal, but it is life changing.

How will dialysis change my life?

Kidneys clean the blood, remove waste products and regulate blood and bone health. These functions have to be replaced.

- You will need dialysis to take over cleaning and waste removal and
- A combination of diet and drugs to manage your blood and bone health.

What does it involve?

There are two types of dialysis:

- Peritoneal Dialysis (PD), which uses a natural membrane in your abdomen to remove waste products. Special dialysis fluid is poured into your abdomen via a small plastic tube. Waste products are absorbed by the dialysis fluid, which is then drained out again. This is done several times a day or once overnight.
- Haemodialysis (HD), where blood containing waste and toxins is pumped from your body through a filter, which cleans it, and then back into your body. It takes 3-4 hours each time, about three times per week. During each session, the equivalent of all the blood in your body is filtered several times.



Which dialysis should I choose?

PD is a relatively gentle but effective dialysis technique, and is often recommended for people starting out on dialysis. However it is not recommended for people who are very overweight.

HD has a higher impact on the body than PD, but most people adjust after a few weeks. Most studies show that HD offers a longer survival rate for long-term patients.

Talk it over with your doctor and your family.

Will dialysis take over my life?

It may feel like that at first, but no.

Dialysis is intrusive, but manageable: typically you'll need it for 12 – 15 hours each week plus setup time, say 18 hours in total. That's a big chunk of time; it will take a few months to get used to it, but you will. And however you look at it, 18 hours is just 11 per cent of the 168 hours in your week; you will still have 89 per cent of each week to do what you do now.

Many people think of dialysis as the equivalent of a part-time job: a commitment, but not life-defining.

Will I feel better?

Yes. Before dialysis, as your kidneys gradually fail, you will feel lousy, weak and miserable. But once you begin dialysis, you'll gradually feel better and. This is not surprising, since the artificial kidney has removed the bulk of the toxins and waste products that were making you feel terrible. What is surprising is just how much better you will feel. You will think better; you may even feel a like some exercise.

Will I still be able to work?

Yes, many people who dialyse still work, by adjusting the time they dialyse: some people dialyse in the early morning, others in the evening, or even through the night.

Should I try for a Transplant?

Everyone facing dialysis feels the same: how can I get out of this? How about a transplant?

It is rare for people to receive a transplant before they go onto dialysis, not least because of the shortage of (deceased) donors. There's a waiting list, and waiting time is measured in years, not months. There is also a living donor scheme, where a generous friend or relative could donate you one of their healthy kidneys. This may be possible if you are both compatible.

But bear in mind that a transplant is not a cure; it is just another kind of treatment. A transplant involves major surgery, is not without risk, and ongoing downsides, including anti-rejection drug side-effects and a compromised immune system. Don't rush into it.

So, what should I expect from dialysis?

You should expect to invest around 18 hours of your time per week sitting quietly, so start thinking of things to do now while you are there. On HD, you should expect a few seconds of needle pain that will become less and less worrisome over time. But mostly, you should expect to feel pretty well within a week or so of your first run. It's not something to dread; it's not easy at first, but it gets easier to handle as time goes on, and it gives much more than it takes.

Deal with dialysis the way you deal with all the other obstacles in your life, one day at a time.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, HELP, ADVICE AND SUPPORT GO TO <http://bigdandme.wordpress.com>.



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