

Big D and Me ~ Briefing # 2

Healthy dialysis techniques for people whose kidneys have let them down



Your First Dialysis Session ~ What to expect

How do you feel?

Your first dialysis session is always a little scary. If you are like most people, you will have put off starting dialysis until you are about at death's door, so you'll be feeling weak, nauseous, tired and generally lousy.

On top of this often there is often a strong dose of anxiety of the unknown. Even if you have been told what to expect, now it is really happening: will it hurt? How will I feel? Will something go wrong?

And of course, simmering below the surface are various proportions of denial and anger at being there in the first place.

So your first dialysis session can create quite a cocktail of emotion and stress.

What to Expect: from staff

In most units, the dialysis staff understand how you are feeling, and will try to make your first session as simple and stress free as possible. It is common practice for units to allocate one of their most experienced and competent people to take you through your first session. Their confidence usually helps to calm things a little for you.

He or she will explain each step of the process in detail and then begin.

What to Expect: the procedure.

1. Wash up

First, you'll be asked to wash your hands and (if you have a fistula) your fistula arm. Since the fistula is to be punctured, you need to be sure that there are no bugs around the puncture area that could get into your bloodstream.

2. Weigh

Next you need to be weighed. Since your kidneys have failed, you will probably be carrying a few kilos of additional fluid. One of the aims of the session will be to remove some of that fluid, firstly to make you more comfortable and secondly to reduce the workload on your heart. At the first session, many people typically are carrying two to five kilos (4.5 to 11 pounds) of fluid.

3. Calculate how much fluid to remove

Your nurse/technician will work this out by subtracting your base weight (the weight you would be if your kidneys were working properly) from the scale weight. For example, if your base weight was 72kg (159lb) and the scale weight was 75kg (165lb), the ideal amount to remove would be 3kg (6.5lb), plus any fluid you drink during the session. However, since this is your first session, dialysis is usually introduced to your body very gently, so he/she may decide to remove just 0.5kg (1lb), and gradually remove the rest over subsequent runs.



4. Sit in the chair/lay on the bed

You need to sit or lay for the duration of the session. Some units have reclining chairs other have beds. Either way, climb aboard and relax. Your dialysis machine will be located next to you. By now it will be set up with plastic tubes and a filter, ready for your session.

5. Check your blood pressure

Once you are sitting relaxed, the nurse/tech will measure your blood pressure and temperature. This is to ensure that you are well enough to handle the session and to provide a baseline for subsequent BP measures during the run.

6. Needle time

This is the only unpleasant bit, but it only lasts for a few seconds for each needle. *You don't need to do anything except hold out your arm; many people choose to simply look the other way until the needles are in and tested.*

The nurse/tech will examine your fistula and choose two points at least 8cm (3in) apart as the site for each dialysis needle. He/she then injects a small amount of local anaesthetic at each location. Each injection will be a sharp sting – but this is the only painful bit. Your fistula will probably be quite small and soft, and a dialysis needle will be inserted carefully at each location. Each needle will be taped in place and the blood flow tested with a syringe.

7. Get connected to the dialysis machine

The nurse/tech then connects the needle lines to the dialysis machine blood lines and turns on the pump: your blood flows from your arm, along the lines, and through the filter, which removes toxins and some fluid. The clean blood then flows back into your arm. It looks like a lot of blood, but barely a cupful is out of your body at any one time. Some people do react to dialysis: their BP may drop, or they get cramps, feel nauseous, or have chills and shivers, others may get headaches or become sensitive to light; these are temporary problems that usually fade as you gradually adapt to dialysis.

8. Have a cup of tea and relax

Depending on how the unit operates, your nurse/tech or assistant will offer you a small cup of tea or coffee or a cool drink. For the next few hours all you need to do is relax. If you need to go to the loo urgently, you can be disconnected from the machine for as long as it takes. And don't panic if the machine alarms, they tend to over-react, so stay cool. Otherwise you can do pretty much what you like as long as you don't disturb the needles or the blood flow. Read a book, use your computer or tablet, watch TV or chat to friends.

9. Regular checks

About every half hour the nurse/tech will check that you are OK and tolerating the dialysis. He/she will also measure your BP and record a series of machine settings.

10. At the end of the session

The dialysis machine has clock that counts down through the session and sounds an alarm when time is up. The nurse/tech will then stop the pump, and over about five minutes return all the blood in the lines back to your arm. He/she will then disconnect the lines.

11. Remove the needles

He/she removes the needles one at a time, placing a gauze pad or a special adhesive pad over the hole. You may be asked to press on the holes for few minutes, until the bleeding stops, or they may use special clamps. Once the bleeding stops, each hole is taped. You can remove the tapes and dressing after a few hours.

12. Weigh

Once again you need to be weighed. If all goes as planned, your weight should now be your arrival weight less the amount removed during the session.

Once this is done, you will have completed your first dialysis session and can go home. You have successfully jumped the first hurdle.

Of course there is still much to learn about dialysis, but having taken this most important step, you have plenty of time.

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



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