Going Home After an AV Fistula or AV Graft

Information for patients and families

During your hospital stay, your surgeon created an:

☐ AV Fistula
☐ AV Graft

Read this booklet to learn:

• how to care for your wound when you first get home
• how to care for your AV fistula or AV graft
• what problems to look out for
• who to call if you have any questions

Don’t drive a car or drink alcohol for 24 hours. You may eat and drink normally after your surgery.
How do I take care of my wound when I get home?

If your arm is in a sling, only wear it for the **first 24 hours** after your surgery. Try to move your arm as much as is comfortable after that. Follow these steps to take care of your wound:

1. You will have a bandage on your arm. Keep it dry for 48 hours after your surgery. If you need to shower, wrap your arm in plastic and tape well to keep it dry. Don’t take baths until your wound is healed or your coordinator says it’s OK.

2. After 48 hours, you can remove the bandage. Wash the area with mild soap and water. Gently pat this area dry with a towel. Don’t use any creams or lotions over the site.

3. If there are small white tapes under the bandage, leave them in place. It is important to leave them in place for 1 week or until they fall off.

4. After you take your bandage off, your incision may ooze clear fluid. If this happens, you may cover it with clean dry gauze. Please change this gauze as often as needed.

5. Your surgeon used 1 of 2 ways to close your incision (cut made during surgery). Follow the instructions below for the way your incision was closed.
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<tr>
<th>If you have:</th>
<th>Do this:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Small tapes (steri strips) and dissolvable sutures</td>
<td>Leave the tapes on until they fall off. This usually happens 7 to 10 days after your surgery. The sutures will dissolve on their own in about 10 days.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staples or stitches</td>
<td>Make an appointment with your co-coordinator to have your staples taken out 14 days after your surgery. The stitches must stay in place at least 14 days or longer. <em>Don’t have your family doctor remove them.</em></td>
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**How will my arm feel?**

You may have some pain for a few days. You will get a prescription for Tylenol#3 (acetaminophen and codeine). Take it as directed to help with the pain. If you have an allergy to this medicine, we will prescribe you a different one.

**AV graft**

Your arm may swell for about 2 weeks after your surgery. This is normal. To reduce the swelling, keep your arm up when you are resting or sitting. Put it on 2 pillows at the same level as your heart.

**AV fistula and AV graft**

Your arm may be cool and numb where the fistula or graft was put in. This lasts a few weeks and is normal. This will reduce as your circulation gets used to the new fistula or graft.
What about other medicines?
Please talk to your doctor if you stopped a blood thinning medicine before your surgery. They will let you know when you can start taking it again.

Remember to tell all health care workers that you have an AV fistula or AV graft. Don’t use the arm with your access site for:

- taking your blood pressure
- having blood taken
- having an intravenous (IV) put in

How do I care for my fistula or graft?

For both AV fistula and AV graft:

- Don’t sleep on your access arm.
- Don’t wear tight fitting clothing around your access arm.
- Don’t put:
  - elastic bands
  - watchbands
  - purses
  - or shopping bags on your access arm.
- Don’t lift anything that weighs more than 10 pounds with your access arm for the first 3 weeks.
- Don’t push or pull with the access arm for the first 3 weeks.
- Never pick scabs near your graft or fistula needles sites.
- Don’t keep your access arm bent for a long time.
- Don’t do activities like gardening, jogging or playing sports until your doctor says it’s OK.
For AV fistula:

- Every day, check that you can feel a “thrill” over your fistula site. A thrill feels like a vibration or pulse (heart beat). This means your fistula is working well. A nurse will teach you how to do this after your surgery.
- Exercise your fistula by squeezing a soft rubber ball. This will help strengthen it.
  - Wait 2 weeks after your surgery before you start (or after your staples or stitches have been removed).
  - Squeeze the rubber ball 10 times, 2 to 3 times a day.

You do not need to exercise your graft. It is already the size needed for dialysis.

Call your vascular access coordinator during the day, or go to your nearest emergency department if you have:

- **Painful tingling or numbness in your fingers.**
  Your hand should not be more painful than your incision (cut) sites. Some numbness and tingling is normal.
- **Severe pain that does not get better with pain medicine.**
- **Seriously injured or hurt your access arm.**
  For example, if you fell on your arm or cut your skin around the access site.
- **Redness, swelling or pus (yellowish liquid) from your wound.**
- **A lot of bleeding that doesn’t stop after putting pressure on your wound for 15 minutes.**
- **A fever higher than 38 °C or 100 °F.**
What about swelling?

Swelling of your arm, hand and fingers (if you had an AV graft placed) is normal. It takes about 2 weeks for the swelling to go down. If you are worried, do this test:

Press on your swollen arm with your finger. If the area you pressed down takes more than a minute to disappear, call your coordinator or doctor to see your arm.

Who can I call if I have any questions?

If you have any questions, please call your Vascular Access Coordinator at 416 340 4800 extension 3518.

After office hours: If you have any problems listed in the chart above, go to the nearest emergency department.

Visit www.uhnpatienteducation.ca for more health information.

Contact us to provide feedback or request this brochure in a different format, such as large print or electronic formats: pfep@uhn.ca