Nocturnal Hemodialysis

Information for patients and families

Read this information to learn:

- what nocturnal hemodialysis is
- the benefits
- how to get started
- who to call if you have any questions

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What is nocturnal hemodialysis?
During nocturnal hemodialysis, you dialyze while you are sleeping at home, 5 to 6 nights a week.

Dr. R. Uldall developed this way of doing dialysis in Toronto in 1994. It’s now being used all over the world. Dr. Christopher Chan is the Medical Director of our program at the University Health Network.

What are the benefits?
Healthy kidneys work 24 hours a day. If you need dialysis, it’s not practical to do it 24 hours a day. But, we know the longer you dialyze, the better you feel.

With nocturnal dialysis, you can dialyze longer and more comfortably. This leads to improved:

- heart function
- energy
- appetite
- sex drive

Other benefits of nocturnal dialysis:

- **You can eat foods you couldn't eat before**
  With nocturnal dialysis, you don’t have to avoid certain foods. Foods like oranges, bananas, milk, chocolate and cheese are allowed again.

- **You don’t have to restrict your fluids**
  If you dialyze 5 to 6 nights a week, you usually don’t need to drink less.
• **You need to take fewer medicines**
  Nocturnal dialysis gets rid of phosphate very well, so you don’t need to take phosphate binders. Often, people can stop taking many of their blood pressure or other medicines.

• **You don’t have dialysis crashes**
  Dialysis can sometimes cause blood pressure drops, vomiting, or a feeling like you will faint. This is called a *dialysis crash*. Because nocturnal dialysis is long and gentle, you won’t experience these crashes. That makes it very safe to dialyze at home, even if there is no one else in your house or apartment.

  Nocturnal dialysis removes fluid very slowly and gently, so it’s much easier on your heart and body. Other symptoms like thirst, dizziness, headache, cramps and tiredness also usually disappear.

• **You sleep better**
  On nocturnal dialysis, your sleep often returns to normal. You snore less, sleep more deeply and wake up feeling more refreshed.

Everyone’s experience is different, but many studies and patients tell us this is the best kind of dialysis offered. In Ontario, there is no cost to you for nocturnal dialysis.

**What about needling?**
People with AV fistulas and grafts learn to put in their own needles safely. The needles are very well attached so they don’t come out during sleep. People with dialysis catheters can also do nocturnal dialysis safely.
How do I get started?
You learn to do nocturnal dialysis at the Home Dialysis Unit. When you are finished training and go home, you start your dialysis at night before you go to sleep. You finish treatment in the morning when you wake up. This leaves your daytime free to do other things.

When do I start doing it on my own?
When you learn nocturnal dialysis, you won’t start doing it on your own until you are ready. The nurses will help you, and they do home visits. A doctor will keep track of your care and regularly check your blood work.

Who can I call if I have any questions?
If you have any questions, call the Home Hemodialysis Unit. Come for a tour and talk with nurses and other people on nocturnal dialysis.

Home Hemodialysis Unit
Toronto General Hospital
Norman Urquhart Building – Ground Floor (room 404)
Phone: 416 340 3736