Care After Placement of Your Dialysis Catheter

What is a dialysis catheter?
A small flexible plastic tube (catheter) was put in a vein near your neck or collarbone. This catheter can be used for about 6 to 8 weeks until it is no longer needed or a more permanent catheter is inserted.

You may have one to three small tubes (tails) hanging out from where the catheter was put in. The tails will have caps and/or clamps on them that must stay in place whenever the catheter is not being used.

You may feel some pain or tenderness/swelling at the catheter site and up into the shoulder for a few days up to a week after it is placed. This should go away on its own, but you may try some of these measures to help decrease the amount of discomfort that you have.

1. Ice – Ice is best if started right after your catheter is inserted. Apply ice (crushed ice in a plastic bag covered by a towel) to the catheter area for 15 to 20 minutes every hour as long as you need it. Do not sleep with an ice pack on because it may cause frostbite.

2. Heat – You can apply a warm compress (small towel dampened with hot water and placed in a plastic bag or heating pad set on low) to your catheter site after the first 24 to 48 hours as needed for comfort. Apply heat for 15 to 20 minutes every hour as long as you need it. Do not sleep with heat on because it may cause a burn.

3. Medication – You can take over-the-counter medication (Tylenol, Motrin) as directed on the package to relieve pain and swelling as long as it does not interfere with any other medication that you are taking.

Dressing
A small puncture wound was made to insert your catheter. A dressing will be put over the catheter site before you leave today.

To help your puncture site heal quickly, follow these instructions:
• Keep the site and dressing clean and dry at all times.

You may shower, but you must cover the dressing with a clean plastic wrap or bag and secure it with tape to prevent water from getting on the dressing.
• If you have to take a tub bath, do not let the catheter ends dangle in the water.

Usually after 3 to 4 weeks, your puncture site should be healed completely. Your doctor’s office or dialysis nurses will instruct you on dressing/site care at this time.

Activity
• Do not take tub baths, use hot tubs or swim for 10 to 14 days.
• Do not lift, push or pull anything over 10 pounds for the next 10 to 14 days.
• Be careful with clothing so it does not get caught and pull on the catheter tails.

For the next 24 hours:
• Do not drive.
• Do not operate heavy or potentially harmful equipment.
• Do not make legally binding decisions.
• Do not drink alcohol, including beer.

Call your doctor if you have:
• Temperature over 100.4° F
• Signs of infection, such as redness, drainage or swelling around the site
• Swelling in the face, neck or affected arm
• Pain in your shoulder, neck or arms that becomes worse and does not go away
• Pain in your catheter while it is being used
• The length of your catheter is longer or shorter than when it was first put in

Call your doctor immediately if you have:
• Chest pain
• Trouble breathing

If your catheter tears or the end cap/clamp falls off, pinch off the catheter where it enters your skin and seek help immediately.

The information presented is intended for general information and educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care provider. Contact your health care provider if you believe you have a health problem.