

What I tell my patients about home haemodialysis

This article discusses undergoing haemodialysis at home, which can lengthen your life and provide you with the best quality of life.

What are the advantages of dialysing at home?

You will have greater independence than if you go to hospital for treatment. Home haemodialysis has excellent long-term results, and improved control of blood pressure, anaemia (a shortage of red blood cells) and bone disease. It is easier to carry on working when you are on home haemodialysis as there are no limitations to the timing of your dialysis sessions. You will not have to wait for machines to be ready for use. You will also have greater flexibility to improve your fluid balance. A further great advantage of home haemodialysis is that you will have no transport problems.

Am I suitable for home haemodialysis?

Your suitability for home haemodialysis is assessed individually. You should meet the following criteria before you can undergo home haemodialysis.

- You should be able and motivated to learn and perform haemodialysis at home.
- You should be able to maintain and monitor your own treatment observations before, during and after dialysis.
- You should not have instability during dialysis – that is, fluctuations in blood pressure or heart rate, dizziness, and so on.
- You should not have complications that make dialysis difficult, or other medical conditions that make home haemodialysis unsafe.
- You should be able to recognise the early signs of complications and seek advice from the supporting team.
- You should be able to insert dialysis needles into your fistula.
- You should have good, functioning vascular access.
- You should have support from your family or carer(s), who need to have made an informed decision to help you with your haemodialysis, unless you can safely manage alone.

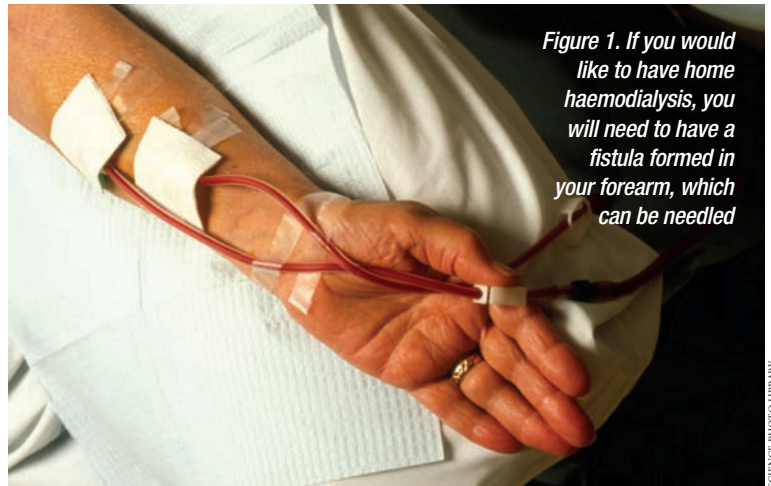


Figure 1. If you would like to have home haemodialysis, you will need to have a fistula formed in your forearm, which can be needled

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- You should have enough suitable space for dialysis facilities, or a place with the potential to be adapted, within your home.

Should I consider home haemodialysis?

Patients with kidney disease are now identified earlier. Most units now have specialist chronic kidney disease teams and clinics. These are dedicated to early education, prevention of complications and preparation for renal replacement treatments.

Initial assessments are carried out by home visits to enable all your family members to be involved in the decision-making process. The earlier a decision is made, the sooner plans for treatment can be started. Although the initial idea of haemodialysis at home can be daunting, it is important to consider all your options carefully.

If you have suddenly developed kidney failure, you may be too poorly to take everything in. It is important to appreciate that the type of dialysis you start with may not be most suited to your long-term needs and lifestyle.

Will I need training?

To go home and do haemodialysis you need a comprehensive training schedule to allow you to develop confidence and self-reliance. Ask your renal unit about the training that they offer.

The amount of time that your training will take varies according to the individual; it can take

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weeks or sometimes months. Don't worry if, after or during your training, you do not feel confident that you can fully take on the responsibility of home haemodialysis. Any part of the training that gives you some ability to help in your treatment and to gain independence is worthwhile. You can review your decision for home haemodialysis if your circumstances change.

There is no pressure to complete home haemodialysis training and, if you decide against it, you can move from self-care to supported self-care (when you will do most of your dialysis yourself, with some support from the renal unit staff), or you can return to dialysis at the unit.

What will I need at home?

You will need space for accommodating not only the machine, but also supplies, such as disposable lines, fluids and drugs, and so on. These supplies will be delivered regularly from your local renal unit.

You will need a telephone, and alterations to your plumbing and electricity supplies may also be needed. Your renal unit's administration team will arrange for a building surveyor to visit your home, who will assess the suitability of installing a dialysis machine. Important areas include the size of the room you intend to use, waste drainage, water and electricity supply, and storage space. The administration team will organise for your electricity and water supplies to be put on a priority list. They will also arrange for dialysis prescription supplies to be delivered to your home. There are reimbursements for the extra costs of electricity, water and heating your dialysis area.

If your home circumstances are unsuitable for home haemodialysis, it is possible for you to learn how to dialyse independently at the main unit or at a satellite unit. This will give you the freedom to dialyse at times that may be more convenient to you.

If you are interested in training to dialyse at home and you currently dialyse via a 'line' (or central venous catheter) in your neck or groin, you can be assessed for your suitability for the

formation of a fistula (when an artery is joined to a vein in your forearm, which is then needed for dialysis – see Figure 1, page 15). Once this has formed and matured, home haemodialysis training can start. There is usually a short waiting list for training, as each patient is given time to learn at their own pace. When a space is available, you will be transferred to the training unit and your personal training plan will be developed.

When will I be able to go home?

This will happen once your training is concluded, your home installation is completed and you have been declared by a consultant as safe to dialyse at home. The technical team will arrange delivery and installation of the dialysis equipment and will provide on-site training in the disinfection and care of the equipment. The training sister and a community sister will meet you at home to complete your first home dialysis session.

Will I get continuing support at home?

Most home haemodialysis patients attend a dedicated home haemodialysis clinic for a medical review two to three times a year. The community dialysis nursing and technical teams maintain support and links with the hospital. Many problems can be resolved by telephone contact. The technical team are available to visit your home and resolve any technical problems that may occur. They will also carry out a routine six-month service on your dialysis equipment.

Community dialysis nurses provide invaluable support and will usually visit you on a monthly basis, and you will be given contact telephone numbers for out-of-hours dialysis-related emergencies. Nursing and medical support is always available. Dedicated spaces are kept available for home haemodialysis patients to return to dialyse in hospital if you have problems with any aspects of your dialysis.

Can I still get a transplant?

If you wanted a kidney transplant before you went on home haemodialysis, work to get you on the transplant list will continue. If you are already on the transplant list, just because you can treat yourself at home does not mean your opportunity for a kidney transplant is altered.

How do I apply?

If you are interested in home haemodialysis training, ask your renal team to refer you to the home training sister, who can provide any further information you may require ■



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Key points

- Home haemodialysis can give you greater independence, and it can lengthen your life.
- You will be given training on how to dialyse at home.
- You can still be eligible for a transplant, even though you are dialysing on your own.