WHAT IS AN ARTERIOVENOUS (AV) FISTULA?

An AV fistula is a join made between an artery and a vein allowing increased blood flow through the vein which makes it larger and thick walled in preparation for use for haemodialysis. The fistula is usually created in the arm and will need 6 - 12 weeks to grow or mature. Sometimes a second operation may be required 6-8 weeks later to bring the vein closer to the surface (superficialisation). If your veins are very small an artificial vein or ‘graft’ may be inserted in the arm.

Pre Operative Education

- The fistula is usually made in your non-dominant arm (if you are right handed, this means your left arm)
- Try not to let anyone take blood from or do blood pressure readings on your potential fistula arm because this can damage the veins.
- Exercise the hand and arm to help the veins to grow

What sort of anaesthetic will I have?

The Anaesthetist will discuss with you the type of anaesthetic which is best for you. You may be given a local anaesthetic injection to numb the area where the fistula will be created or a general anaesthetic (so you are asleep). Please ask any questions you have regarding your anaesthetic at the pre-admission clinic prior to your surgery.

What kind of pain relief will I need?

After your surgery you may require pain relief to be taken by mouth (orally) e.g. paracetamol. Avoid taking anti-inflammatory pain relief (also called ‘NSAIDS’ e.g. Brufen or Neurofen) as they can potentially affect any remaining kidney function you have. If you require any other medications after your surgery, please discuss this with the doctor during your admission and before discharge home.

What happens when I go home?

- After the surgery you will have a dressing placed over the surgical site. The dressing is waterproof, so you can shower, but do not soak it in a bath. You can use the fistula arm for usual activities but do not lift anything heavy (>5kg) or wear anything tight on that arm, including a watch.
- You should not drive a car or operate machinery, sign legal documents, or make important decisions for 24 hours after your procedure.
- You may remove the dressing 7 days after your surgery.
Learning how to feel the fistula

- Gently hold your hand over the wound and sometimes you can feel for a ‘buzzing’ (soft vibration).
- If you notice that the ‘buzz’ has stopped, ring the hospital on 9342 7000, ask for the Nephrology Surgical Registrar.
- Do some gentle exercises with the arm e.g. squeeze ball.
- Protect your arm from abrasions and injury.
- Do not wear anything tight on your fistula arm.

When will I see the surgeon?

A follow up appointment will be made for you to be reviewed by the surgeons in about 2 weeks after the AV fistula creation.

Patients are advised to follow the following instructions:

- We suggest you avoid driving for 2 weeks and/or until review at your outpatient appointment. We encourage you to contact your car insurance company prior to driving to check your policy is valid.
- Your hand may feel cooler than the other side initially so keep it warm by wearing a glove or mitten. Keep warm with extra layers of clothing and using heaters.
- Check your fistula daily for a ‘buzz’ to ensure it is working.
- Check for any redness which could indicate infection.
- Please leave the dressing untouched until 7 days after the surgery.
- No dressing is required after the dressing has been removed. After that time you can get the wound wet in the shower and pat dry after.
- If you are dizzy or lightheaded (and your blood pressure may be low), have a drink and lie down.

Contact the Nephrology Surgical Registrar if there is:

- Bleeding or wound discharge
- Redness, inflammation, heat or discharge from the wound
- A high fever or temperature above 37.5 degrees.
- Severe pain not controlled by pain relief
- The fistula starts to bleed or the ‘buzz’ disappears
- Numbness, tingling, discoloration, or severe pain in the hand
- Swelling of the arm
- Any other concerns you have after the surgery

The information contained in this brochure is for educational purposes only and is not intended as a substitute for consultation with a doctor or health care professional.
Exercises

The following exercises may be helpful to strengthen your fistula and improve maturation. Or you can use an exercise ball.

1. Open and close fingers. 2. Open and close fist. 3. Flex arm with a clenched fist.

4. Rotate forearm, clench fist, then flex arm

Contact

If you are unwell and unable to attend the hospital for your surgery, please contact:
Elective Bookings Service: 9342 8400

If you have any queries about your operation prior to your surgery, please contact the Elective Bookings Service and asked to be put through to the Unit Liaison Nurse.

To contact the registrar after your surgery
9342 7000, ask for the Nephrology Surgery Registrar

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