

## What is Dialysis?

People are given dialysis treatment when their kidneys are not working properly. Dialysis helps to remove toxins that build up in the body and helps to control blood pressure. There are two main types of dialysis:

The most common, **hemodialysis**, draws blood from the body through a machine called a dialyzer. The dialyzer filters out the toxins and excess water and then pumps the blood back into the body. Hemodialysis usually takes place in a hospital, doctor's office or clinic three times a week for four hours at a time. **Peritoneal** dialysis uses the membrane of the abdominal wall, called the peritoneum, to filter the toxins. A catheter is inserted into the abdominal wall and a fluid called dialysate is infused into the area and the waste is drained out. Peritoneal dialysis can be done at home, with or without a machine and is managed by the person receiving the treatment or their caregiver.

A doctor can help determine which dialysis treatment is best for the individual.

## What are the benefits?

- It gives the kidneys a chance to rest and recover, when kidney failure is temporary
- It prevents toxins from building up in the body
- It gives otherwise healthy patients the potential to live for years

## Does dialysis cure kidney disease?

Dialysis will not cure chronic or end stage kidney failure and will be needed for life unless the person is able to get a kidney transplant. Life expectancy on dialysis can vary depending on other medical conditions. It is important to talk with your doctor about the risks and benefits of dialysis specific to your health.

## What are the risks?

Some of the possible risks/side effects of dialysis include:

- Bleeding at the access site
- Low blood pressure
- Irregular heartbeat
- Inflammation of the membrane surrounding the heart (pericarditis)
- Infection
- Itchy skin
- Nausea
- Air bubbles in the blood
- Muscle cramps
- Depression

## Consider these Questions

Everyone has the right to make their own health care choices and inform others of their wishes in the event they cannot speak for themselves someday. These are questions to think and talk about as you decide about dialysis:

- What makes life meaningful for me?
- Under what conditions would I want dialysis?
- Under what conditions/situations would I not want dialysis?
- Would I want dialysis if:
  - I have a terminal illness?
  - I have an end stage condition?
  - I am unable to recognize my loved ones or know who I am?

**Remember to inform your doctors, family and loved ones about your wishes and decisions regarding dialysis as part of your advance care planning. Doing so will make the decision-making process regarding your continued care less difficult for those acting on your behalf.**