

Preparing for Dialysis

Planning ahead gives you more choices and time to prepare

When is dialysis discussed?

Dialysis planning usually begins before dialysis is immediately needed. Your nephrologist considers kidney function trends, symptoms, laboratory results, fluid balance, nutrition and your overall health—not just a single eGFR number.

Planning for dialysis does not mean dialysis will start immediately. Early education allows time to understand your options and prepare safely.

Hemodialysis

- Blood is cleaned through a dialysis filter.
- Treatment may be performed in a dialysis center or, for selected patients, at home.
- Long-term access is usually an AV fistula or AV graft when feasible.
- Planning access early can reduce the need for a temporary dialysis catheter.

Peritoneal dialysis

- Dialysis fluid is placed into the abdomen through a permanent PD catheter.
- Treatments are performed at home, often overnight or in several exchanges.
- Training is provided before home treatment begins.
- Home environment, lifestyle and medical factors help determine whether PD is a good option.

Other options

Some patients may be candidates for kidney transplantation, including evaluation before dialysis begins. For others, particularly when serious medical problems are present, conservative kidney management without dialysis may also be discussed. Decisions should reflect your health, goals and preferences.

Getting Ready

Questions and practical steps before kidney replacement therapy

Planning checklist

- Learn about hemodialysis, peritoneal dialysis and transplant.
- Ask whether you should attend a kidney education class.
- Protect veins in the arm that may be needed for future dialysis access.
- Discuss when referral for AV fistula/graft or PD catheter evaluation is appropriate.
- Review vaccinations and medication adjustments with your care team.
- Ask about transplant referral if appropriate.

Questions to ask

- Which dialysis option fits my medical needs and lifestyle?
- Could home dialysis be an option for me?
- When should access planning begin?
- Am I a candidate for transplant evaluation?
- What symptoms should prompt me to call?
- How will dialysis affect work, travel and diet?

Symptoms that may become important in advanced kidney disease

- Worsening nausea, poor appetite or unintended weight loss
- Increasing swelling or difficulty breathing
- Persistent itching or severe fatigue
- Changes in concentration or alertness
- Difficulty controlling potassium, acid level, blood pressure or fluid despite medical treatment

Dialysis is started for clinical reasons—not simply because an eGFR reaches one specific number. Keep regular nephrology visits so planning can be individualized.