

HOME HAEMODIALYSIS: A TREATMENT OPTION



WHAT IS DIALYSIS?

Dialysis removes waste and extra fluid from your blood. Dialysis or a kidney transplant is needed if you have kidney failure. There are two forms of dialysis - haemodialysis and peritoneal dialysis. During haemodialysis a machine acting as an artificial kidney cleans your blood. Peritoneal Dialysis occurs inside your body using the peritoneal membrane as a filter. Peritoneal Dialysis is usually done at home.

If you choose haemodialysis, you may want to do it at home. If you feel unsure about dialysing at home, dialysis in a renal unit located away from the hospital is another option. Dialysis in a hospital renal unit is usually for those with other serious health problems who may require further medical treatment.

If you have kidney failure, dialysis must be done for the rest of your life or until you get a kidney transplant. If the transplant is unsuccessful, dialysis must be restarted. A person may also choose not to have treatment. See *Haemodialysis*, *Peritoneal Dialysis*, *Kidney Transplant* and *Choosing Whether to Have Treatment* fact sheets for more information.

HOW COMMON IS HOME DIALYSIS?

In Australia about 12% or just over 875 people on haemodialysis choose to do it at home. Rates of home haemodialysis range from 21% in NSW to 2% in SA.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF HOME DIALYSIS?

People on home haemodialysis often report feeling more independent. The reasons for this may include:

- You can choose when you dialyse and fit treatment around other activities such as work and social events. Your doctor and health care team will advise you about how often and long you need to dialyse.
- Travelling for treatment is less, saving time and money. This can also help to reduce tiredness, particularly if travel is difficult.
- You can choose to be with your family or friends while you dialyse.
- You may be able to better assess and prevent dialysis-related problems. For example people on home dialysis tend to have fewer blood pressure drops during treatment as they watch their blood pressure closely.
- If you choose to have short daily dialysis or nocturnal dialysis, you may feel better and have less dietary and fluid restrictions.
- You may have fewer problems with your fistula or graft because the same person puts in the needles each time.



ARE THERE DIFFERENT TYPES OF HOME HAEMODIALYSIS?

When dialysing at home you can perform different types of haemodialysis. Standard home haemodialysis is done three times per week for four to five hours. Nocturnal haemodialysis is also available in some regions. This means that your dialysis is long and slow and done overnight while asleep. You would most likely dialyse at home six nights a week for eight hours each night. Short daily home haemodialysis is also available in some areas. This is usually done five to seven times per week for about two hours. These options can be discussed with your health care team.

Some early information shows that people who have dialysis over longer periods of time and/or more often may live longer. Research is on-going.

WHY DON'T MORE PEOPLE CHOOSE HOME HAEMODIALYSIS?

Some of the reasons why people choose not to do home dialysis, include:

- Not being medically stable
- Lack of awareness that home dialysis is an option
- Not every hospital has a home haemodialysis program
- Being nervous about doing haemodialysis at home
- Being worried about learning to care for the dialysis machine and attending to technical problems

Having some concerns about home dialysis before you do the training is common. By the end of training most people are almost as good at putting in the needles and setting up the machine as the dialysis staff. It is comforting to know that experienced staff are always available to speak with you during the day or night if you have any problems.

ARE THERE RISKS WHEN DOING HOME HAEMODIALYSIS?

You will receive proper training before being allowed to dialyse at home, which includes blood pressure and fluid control education. As with any other sort of dialysis, it is important that you undertake each session with care to reduce the risk of complications.

WHAT TRAINING IS NEEDED FOR HOME DIALYSIS?

Qualified staff will go through the training with you at a special home training centre to learn how to operate a dialysis machine by yourself at home. If you have a carer, they are usually trained at the same time.

During your training you would learn to:

- Take your blood pressure and pulse
- Manage your diet and fluid intake
- Care for your dialysis access (fistula)
- Set up your dialysis machine and dialysis area
- Deal with problems occurring during dialysis, eg low blood pressure
- End your dialysis session
- Order and store dialysis supplies
- Keep treatment records
- Set up a safe area for your haemodialysis treatment
- Care for and clean your machine

WHAT ARE THE COSTS OF HOME DIALYSIS?

You will need to have an area of your home for the dialysis chair and dialysis machine. You will also need to have a place nearby to store supplies. Special plumbing is installed in your home and the quality of the water supply is tested.

Your hospital's Renal Technician and Home Training Nurse carry out an assessment of your home to advise you about how best to set up your home for haemodialysis. The purchase of the dialysis machine and ongoing costs of equipment are covered by the Australian health care system. Some hospitals also provide other support such as covering the cost of plumbing alterations. You may have to cover some home modification and furnishing costs such as the dialysis chair.

If you are renting your house, you will need to speak with either your real estate agent or landlord before making any changes. You may need to get their approval and find out who will pay for the changes.

In some states, people on home haemodialysis can apply for a water rebate through their local council if they have either:

- Pensioner Concession Card
- Department of Veterans' Affairs Gold Card.

Some state governments also provide a concession on electricity bills. Your health care team can advise you and will usually help with applications.

Carers can apply for a financial support through Centrelink if they provide daily care and attention to a person with a disability that causes a 'substantial functional impairment'.

Each person's financial situation is different. You can contact your renal social worker or local Centrelink office if you need more information or financial assistance.

DO YOU NEED A CARER FOR HOME HAEMODIALYSIS?

You may not need a carer when doing your treatment. This depends on your general health and needs to be discussed with your health care team. However you may prefer to have a carer to help in case you have any difficulties. The

carer can check your blood pressure and get things for you while you are on the machine. They can also help with the set up and cleaning of your machine.

WHAT IF YOUR CARER NEEDS A BREAK?

If your carer needs a break you can usually dialyse in a hospital centre. Commonwealth Carer Respite Centres are sometimes able to provide respite for carers of people on home haemodialysis. They offer emergency respite as well as regular respite. This is more difficult for people in regional areas. Contact them on 1800 059 059 to be linked to your closest state office.

HOW WILL IT AFFECT YOUR FAMILY?

Families usually adjust to home dialysis and it quickly becomes a part of family life. You won't have to travel to treatment or spend as much time away from home, which is a bonus for your family.

CAN I WORK WHEN I START DIALYSIS?

When starting dialysis it should be possible to continue working. The benefit of keeping a job include earning an income, maintaining self-esteem and friendships. The challenge when working on dialysis is balancing work and dialysis with the rest of life. Dialysing at home makes it easier to schedule treatments around other personal commitments.

CAN I TRAVEL ON DIALYSIS?

It is still possible to travel if you are receiving haemodialysis, it may make it difficult but not impossible. You may be able to attend work and social events or enjoy a great holiday with careful planning. There are also some groups that offer special holiday programs. See the *Dialysis Unit Guide* for more information about travel.

For more information about kidneys health or this topic, please contact the Kidney Health Australia: Kidney Health Info Line (free call) on 1800 682 531 or visit website www.kidney.org.au

**For more information about nocturnal dialysis visit:
<http://www.nocturnaldialysis.org>**

This is intended as a general introduction to this topic and is not meant to substitute for your doctor's or Health Professional's advice. All care is taken to ensure that the information is relevant to the reader and applicable to each state in Australia. It should be noted that Kidney Health Australia recognises that each person's experience is individual and that variations do occur in treatment and management due to personal circumstances, the health professional and the state one lives in. Should you require further information always consult your doctor or health professional.

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