

# How to Care for a Gortex<sup>®</sup> Fistula

## Check the Flow of Blood Each Day

When blood from your artery is pulsing through the Gortex graft, the fistula makes a “whooshing” sound (bruit) and a vibration (thrill). This means the fistula is working well.

Check the flow of blood through your fistula once in the morning and once in the evening. Place your fingers lightly on the fistula to feel the thrill and listen for the bruit with a stethoscope.

If you do not feel a thrill or hear a bruit, the fistula may be clotted. Call your health care provider or dialysis unit.

## Keep The Fistula From Clotting

- Do not let anyone, except the dialysis nurse, do the following to your fistula arm:
  - put on a blood pressure cuff or tourniquet on
  - draw blood
  - start an intravenous (IV) line.
- Do not wear clothing that has tight sleeves or elastic around your upper arm.
- Do not wear tight jewelry (including a watch) on your fistula arm.
- Do not sleep on your fistula arm.
- Do not carry heavy objects (including a purse or briefcase) on your fistula arm.

## Check For Infection

- Call your health care provider or dialysis unit if you have signs of infection in your fistula arm: redness, swelling, drainage or tenderness (increasing or extreme).

## Clean Your Fistula Arm

For two weeks after getting the fistula, clean your arm every day to prevent infection.

- Remove the dressing (if you have one). You should not need the dressing three to seven days after the incision lines are healed.
- Wash your arm with soap and water. Use a clean washcloth.
- Rinse your arm with clean water.
- Pat your arm dry. Use a clean towel.
- Replace the dressing, if needed.
- Put lotion on your arm for dry skin. Do not put lotion on your incision.
- Do not soak your arm in water (bath, hot tub, swimming).

If you have Steri-Strips<sup>®</sup> (thin paper-like strips) over the incision, they will fall off in about 2 weeks. If they are still on after 2 weeks, you may gently pull them off.

When the incision lines are healed you may wash your fistula arm as you normally would. You may take showers and baths once the incisions are healed.

## Watch Your Activity

- For the first 2 weeks after getting the fistula, limit the use of your fistula arm. You may use your arm for washing, getting dressed and doing light chores. Avoid using your fistula arm for heavy lifting or strenuous activity.
- Keep your arm raised (elevated) to keep the swelling down. Put your arm on pillows when you sit and lie down, or in a sling when you are awake.

Once the incision is healed and the swelling is gone, you may use your arm as you normally would. Follow the instructions in the section called "Keep the Fistula From Clotting."

## When to Call Your Health Care Provider or Dialysis Unit

Call your health care provider or dialysis unit if you:

- can't hear a bruit or feel a thrill in the fistula
- notice redness, swelling, drainage or increased tenderness in your fistula arm
- start bleeding from old needle puncture sites on your fistula arm
- develop a large bruise on your fistula arm.

## Reminders

- Check for a bruit or thrill every morning and evening.
- Follow the precautions to keep the blood flow through your fistula strong.
- Check your fistula every day for signs of infection.
- Keep your incision lines clean.
- Keep your arm raised (elevated) until the swelling is gone.