



Kidney Q&A

4-12 months

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How do blood flow and time affect the amount of dialysis I get?

Q: How do blood flow and time affect the amount of dialysis I get?

A: During hemodialysis (HD), your blood is cleaned by passing it through an artificial kidney. Inside the kidney, your blood flows through thousands of hollow fibers, each dotted with tiny holes. The hollow fibers are bathed with a special dialysate fluid. Wastes from your blood go through the holes and into the fluid, where they are washed away.

Blood flow rate is how fast your blood is pumped through the kidney. If your blood flow rate is faster, your blood will pass through the kidney to be cleaned more times during a treatment. Blood flow may be limited by your access. A fistula or graft often has faster flows than a catheter. If your blood pressure drops or you have cramps, the staff may turn your blood flow rate down, so less blood is filtered at that treatment.

The more time you spend on HD, the longer your blood will be cleaned. Healthy kidneys work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week—168 hours each week. Dialysis may be just 12 to 15 hours a week, so it is vital to get each minute of treatment your doctor prescribes so you can feel your best.

What I can do to get enough in-center hemodialysis:

- Ask the staff what my prescribed blood flow rate and dialysis time is. Right now, my time is: _____ and my blood flow rate is: _____.
- Ask my nurse or tech where to read the blood flow rate on my machine.
- Ask my doctor about getting a fistula or graft if I don't have one.
- Know my fluid limit between treatments and follow it. Right now, my fluid limit is _____ oz./day.
- Stay for each minute of each treatment and make up any time I lose to machine alarms.
- Ask my doctor what time I should take my blood pressure pills on dialysis days:

_____.
- Ask my nurse if I can take any drug to prevent cramps during treatment.
- Visit module 10 of Kidney School™: *Getting Adequate Dialysis* at www.kidneyschool.org to learn more.