



Kidney Q&A

4-12 months

Life Options Rehabilitation Program
414 D'Onofrio Drive, Ste. 200
Madison, WI 53719
www.lifeoptions.org

Q: What should I do if I believe my access has clotted?

A: If the *thrill*, or rush of blood through your fistula or graft, stops, you may have a blood clot. What you should do—right away—is call your doctor or the emergency phone number your dialysis center gave you. Describe the problem and tell them that you want to be seen right away.

A clot must be treated quickly, or it can seal off your fistula or graft so no blood can go through it. A blood clot can often be treated by injecting a drug into your access to dissolve it. A clot may also be treated with surgery or an X-ray procedure to find and remove the clot.

Catheters can clot, too. An anti-clotting drug is left in your catheter after it is used, but even so, clots can block the tubing. To fix this, a drug is used to dissolve the clot, or the catheter may have to be replaced.

Blood clots can break loose and travel through your body. If you had a blood clot and you notice new back pain or trouble breathing, seek emergency medical care.

What I can do to avoid blood clots in my access:

- Feel for the thrill (buzzing) and listen for the bruit (swooshing) on my fistula or graft at least once a day.

- Avoid squeezing my access with tight sleeves, jewelry, watches, carrying heavy weights across it, or sleeping on it.
- Ask my doctor for a letter asking non-dialysis healthcare staff not to take my blood pressure or lab tests from my access arm or leg. Keep the letter with me at all times, in case I need medical care.
- Know my dose of anti-clotting drugs (like heparin) and make sure I get the right dose. My heparin dose is: _____.
- Know my fluid weight goal and take off only the prescribed amount.
- Tell my nurse or tech if I feel dizzy, sick to my stomach, or see spots. My blood pressure may be low, which could make my access clot.
- Learn how much pressure to use when I hold my sticks after dialysis.
- Visit module 8 of Kidney School™: *Vascular Access: A Lifeline for Dialysis* at www.kidneyschool.org to learn more about caring for my access.
- Visit www.fistulafirst.org and click *patients* to find many resources about vascular access.