

Haemodialysis Access: Information for patients choosing to dialyse with a line, rather than a fistula

We understand that you have chosen to continue to dialyse via a tunnelled line rather than have a fistula formed. We would just like to make sure that you are aware of the risks and benefits so that you can make an informed decision. Ultimately, we can only advise you of your options, but we have recommended a fistula because we feel that it is the best treatment option for you.

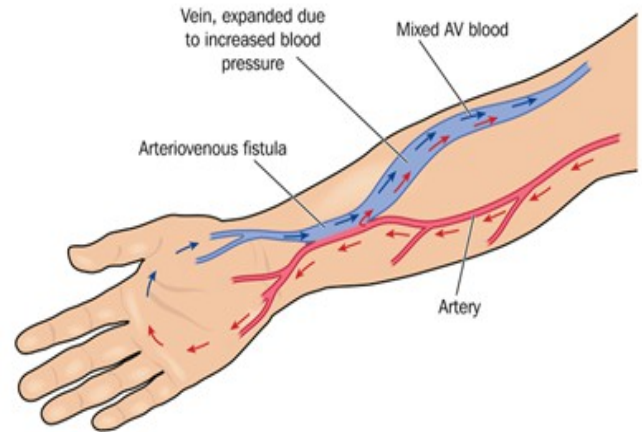
What is a fistula:

A fistula is a direct connection between an artery and a vein in your arm under the skin. This can be performed under local anaesthetic and is usually done as a day case. Over time the vein gets bigger and stronger allowing needles to be inserted for dialysis.

(Diagram from www.kidneydisease.com)

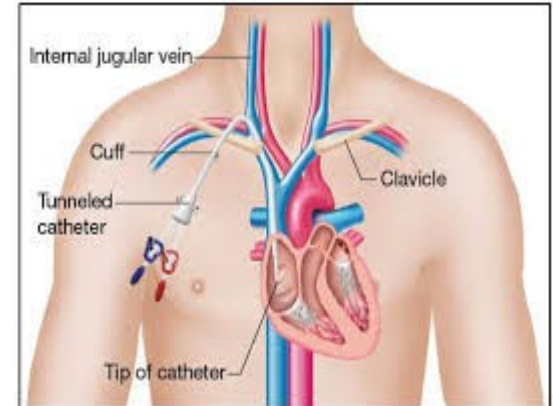
Benefits of a fistula:

- Less risk of infections of the blood (septicaemia) compared to lines.
- Better blood flow, therefore more effective dialysis.
- Lasts longer than a line – some fistulas last up to 20 years! Lines often have to be replaced due to infection or blockage.
- Fewer hospital stays.
- Better survival (lower risk of dying compared to patients dialysing through lines).



Disadvantages of a fistula:

- Sometimes the vein does not stretch enough to be used.
- Takes at least 6-8 weeks to develop after surgery.
- May need occasional local anaesthetic procedures to stretch parts of the fistula if they become narrow (fistuloplasty or ballooning)
- Over time can become large (aneurysmal) or stop working.



(Diagram from www.kidney.ca).

Dialysis Line:

A line is a plastic tube inserted into a vein in the neck that can be buried under the skin of the chest. The tip of the line sits in the upper chamber of your heart. It is usually a temporary way of gaining access to your blood for dialysis. The procedure is performed under local anaesthesia by doctors either on the ward or in the X-ray department and you can go home the same day.

Advantages:

- Can be used immediately for dialysis.

Disadvantages:

- High risk of infection of the bloodstream – this can lead to complications such as infection of the heart valves or spine.
- Lines can become blocked and require replacement – this can be after only a few months. Lines rarely last longer than a year without complications.
- Lower blood flow than a fistula, therefore dialysis may take longer and be less effective.
- Line has to be kept dry and therefore swimming and bathing are not allowed. The line has to be covered with a waterproof dressing in order to shower.
- Lines can cause ‘scarring’ in the vein (called stenosis). This may lead to problems with blood flow which can cause swelling in the face or arm. It can also make future access for dialysis more difficult.

We are happy to discuss this with you further if you require more information, now or in the future. You are always able to change your mind if you would like to consider having a fistula at any point. If you would like to speak with the Dialysis Access Nurse Specialists, your dialysis nurses can arrange this for you.

Contacts-

Dialysis Access Nurse Specialists – 01603 288666
Norfolk and Norwich Kidney Centre (Bowthorpe) – 01603 288240
Acute Dialysis ward (Langley) – 01603 287069