Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center
A teaching hospital of Harvard Medical School
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information

Dialysis permacath surgery:
General discharge instructions

☏ Call if you have problems or questions:

Regular business hours:

Dialysis access coordinator : 617-632-9817

Evenings, nights, weekends, or holidays:

617-632-9700: Ask for "Transplant coordinator on call"

You have just had a hemodialysis catheter placed. It is known as a "permacath." One end of the catheter is in a vein in your neck; the other end is in your chest. This is why you have a small incision in your neck as well as the catheter on your chest.

This sheet goes over some common questions or concerns you or your family may have. **If you have problems at home, please call us at the numbers listed in the box.**

What to expect

- Some pain, slight bruising, and swelling are normal on both your chest and neck. If pain, bruising, or swelling get worse instead of better over the next few days, please call for advice. Also, please call if you notice spreading areas of redness or warmth around either incision.
- You will have two dressings: one on your neck and one on your chest.
- A small amount of drainage on your dressings in normal. If a dressing is soaked with blood, or if you see thick yellow drainage (pus) on a dressing, please call us for advice.

Your dressings

- You will have a small dressing over the neck incision. Your dialysis nurse may change this dressing after two days. You should keep a dressing over this incision until the wound heals, which is usually in about seven-ten days. The nurses in the dialysis unit will change this dressing for you as needed.
- The neck incision does not have stitches or sutures. You may see some small paper stitches (steri-strips). These will fall off on their own, or they will be removed when you see your doctor in about two weeks.
- The nurses in the dialysis unit will also take care of changing the dressing on your chest. Please do not let anyone else change this dressing. The nurses will ask you to wear a mask when the dressing is changed to help prevent infection of the area. You will have a dressing over this area for as long as you have your permacath.

- There is a stitch at the catheter site in your chest. The dialysis nurse or your surgeon will remove this stitch in about three weeks.

- Although it may be difficult to get used to, it is important that you never get the dressing on your chest wet. You should not shower or swim with a permacath in place. It is ok to take a tub bath as long as you do not get the dressing wet. This is important because bacteria grow easily in a wet or moist environment. If bacteria begin to grow around your permacath, they could cause a serious infection at the site or in your bloodstream.

- Try not to push or pull on the catheter, especially in the first three weeks. Don't do anything that causes stretching or strain in the area.

Medications

- You will be discharged with a prescription for pain medication. Please take as directed. The medicine should ease the discomfort at the site, although you will continue to feel some discomfort over the next few days. If pain at the site is severe, or if it does not get better with medicine, please call for advice.

- The pain medicine may cause constipation. Talk with your own doctor about whether you need to take a stool softener or mild laxative.

- We recommend that you do not take prescription pain medication for longer than three days. If you feel you need medicine for longer than three days, please call for advice.

- If you were taking blood-thinners such as aspirin or warfarin (Coumadin) before surgery, please talk with your doctor about when to resume this medicine. You should go back to taking any other medicines you were on before surgery.

Activity

- Avoid lifting anything weighing more than 10 pounds for the next three days. Ten pounds is about the weight of two phone books or a gallon of milk. Lifting may put a strain on the incision before it has had a time to heal.

- Please do not drive until you have stopped taking prescription pain medicine.

- Other activities such as work, housework, or sex may be resumed when you are ready, using common sense, and following the other restrictions outlined above.

Call for advice if…

Please call us at the numbers listed on the front of this brochure if you notice any of the following:

- The dressing on your chest or neck becomes saturated with blood
- The incision on your chest or neck is draining thick, yellow material
- You have a fever of more than 100°F and/or chills
- You notice spreading areas of redness or warmth around the incision on your chest or neck
- Your arm, neck, face, or chest on the catheter side becomes swollen

Follow-up appointment

If you are starting dialysis within the next two weeks, the staff in dialysis will check your permacath.

If you are not starting dialysis, you should make an appointment to see the surgeon who placed your access in about two weeks. Please call: **617-632-9700** to schedule this appointment.

Appointment date and time (about 2 weeks after surgery):_____

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MC0904 08/07