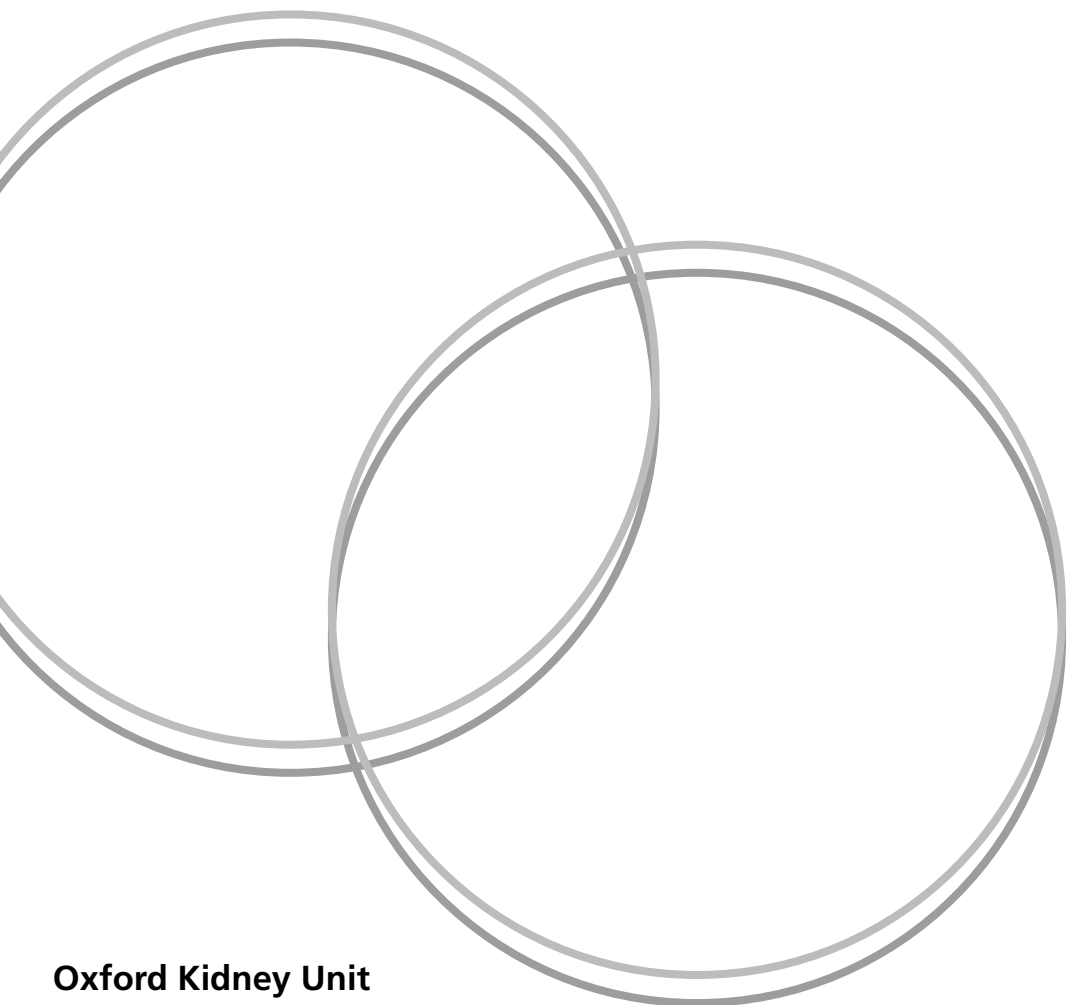




Oxford University Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Renal: Preserving Your Veins

Information for renal and
transplant patients



Oxford Kidney Unit

This leaflet has been written to help you understand the importance of looking after your veins, also known as vein preservation. If there is anything else you need to know after reading this leaflet, please speak to your kidney doctor or specialist nurse.

What is a vein?

Veins are blood vessels which return blood from your body back to your heart. Veins are important, as they are what we use to take samples of your blood (venepuncture) to carry out important blood tests. However, veins are very delicate and can become damaged by repeated blood samples taken from the same vein.

Why do I need regular blood tests?

To monitor your kidney function, blood will be taken from the veins in your arms regularly, using small needles. This may need to be done each time you come to see your kidney doctor, specialist nurse or GP.

Every time blood is taken from a vein, it will cause some damage to the vein walls. This can cause the vein to become scarred and difficult to use. Sometimes your veins become so scarred that we are unable to get blood from a particular vein.

Why is it important to preserve my veins?

As your kidney disease worsens and your kidney function declines, you may need to think about starting dialysis. Your specialist nurse or kidney doctor will talk to you about this.

One of the dialysis treatments is called haemodialysis. For you to be able to have haemodialysis treatment we will need to access your blood system through an 'arteriovenous fistula'. You will need to have healthy veins to make a fistula.

You will be given leaflets about dialysis when you need them.

What is an arteriovenous fistula (AVF)?

Surgeons create an AVF by making a connection between an artery (which carries blood away from the heart) and vein (which carries blood to the heart). This process helps the vein become larger and stronger. For more information please ask for our 'Access for haemodialysis' leaflets.

Veins which have been repeatedly used for taking blood samples may not be suitable to make an AVF. This will mean you may need to be offered other options, which your specialist nurse will discuss with you.

If I have an AVF where will it be?

If you have an AVF made, your surgeon will usually use your non-dominant arm (the arm you don't write with). Sometimes this is not possible, for variety of reasons, and the AVF may need to be made in your dominant arm. This is why it is important that you know how to preserve the veins in both of your arms.

How can I protect my veins?

There are steps you can take to help preserve your veins:

- If you are having blood taken or a cannula put in, for intravenous access, ask the healthcare professional to use the veins on the top of your hand. If this is not possible, venepuncture should be attempted in your dominant arm.
- Remind medical staff which veins they should be using.
- Make sure that healthcare professionals don't use the same vein each time, especially if your arm veins have to be used.
- Remind healthcare professionals not to use the veins in the front area of your elbow (unless there is no other option).
- If you're unsure which veins should be used, ask your specialist nurse. They will tell you the best veins to be used. They will also be able to advise any healthcare professionals.
- Wear a wristband on your non-dominant hand, which says that you are a renal patient. This should alert healthcare professionals that veins in your arm need preserving. Please ask your specialist nurse where you can get one of the wristbands.

Useful websites

Oxford Kidney Unit

Lots of information about the Oxford Kidney Unit for patients and carers.

Website: www.ouh.nhs.uk/oku

Kidney Patient Guide

Information for patients with kidney failure and those who care for them.

Website: www.kidneypatientguide.org.uk

Kidney Care UK

A charity which has lots of practical support and information for people with kidney disease.

Website: www.kidneycareuk.org

Six Counties Kidney Patients Association

The SCKPA is run for patients by patients or family members.

They offer support to people suffering from kidney disease or who are on dialysis. They work closely with the Oxford Kidney Unit and have branches in Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire, and Milton Keynes, and parts of Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and Berkshire.

Website: www.sixcountieskpa.org.uk

National Kidney Federation

A charity which has lots of practical support and information for people with kidney disease.

Website: www.kidney.org.uk

Here for Me (patient portal)

'Health for Me' enables you to access to your digital health record via the OUH Patient Portal. It is an online system that allows you to easily view parts of your digital health record safely and securely from a computer or smartphone.

Please ask a member of the renal team to sign you up to the patient portal.

If your bloods are taken through the Oxford Kidney Unit you will be able to see these results. We can give you a leaflet that explains what the blood test results mean. If you would like a copy please ask a member of the renal team.

How to contact us

Your veins are important. If you have any questions about the information in this leaflet, please contact the Vascular Access Team or Pre-Dialysis Team.

Vascular Access Specialist Nurses

Tel: **01865 225 373**

01865 225 910

(Monday to Friday, 8.00am to 5.00pm)

Pre-dialysis Specialist Nurses

Tel: **01865 226 158**

01865 223 796

(Monday to Friday, 8.00am to 5.00pm)

Further Information

Please speak to the department where you are being seen if you would like an interpreter. You will find their contact details on your appointment letter. Please also ask them if you would like this information leaflet in another format, such as:

- easy read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronically
- in another language.

We have tried to make this information meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They will be happy to help.

Authors: Jo Carter, Vascular Access Nurse
Sheera Sutherland, Haemodialysis Research Nurse

January 2021

Review: January 2024

Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
www.ouh.nhs.uk/information



Making a difference across our hospitals

charity@ouh.nhs.uk | 01865 743 444 | hospitalcharity.co.uk

OXFORD HOSPITALS CHARITY (REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER 1175809)

