



Oxford University Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Oxford Kidney Unit

Preserving Your Veins

Information for renal and
transplant patients



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 the 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.

Further information

The Oxford Kidney Unit website has information about the Unit, which you and your relatives and friends might find useful.

Website: www.ouh.nhs.uk/oku/

Kidney Research UK Health

Website: www.kidneyresearchuk.org/health-information/blood-pressure-and-kidney-disease

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)

100,000 Genomes Project

World class research is carried out at Oxford University Hospitals. We are also a Genomics Medicine Centre and you may be eligible to take part in the 100,000 Genomes project. During your visit you may be approached about clinical research studies and the Genomes project. If you would like further information, please ask your healthcare professional or visit the website:

www.ouh.nhs.uk/research/projects/genomes.aspx

If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter,
a document in Easy Read, another language, large print,
Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473**
or email **PALS@ouh.nhs.uk**

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December 2017
Review: December 2020
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