



Network Consumer News

Why can't patients cover their access arm with a sheet or blanket?

Lynda Ball, MSN, RN, CNN

The overriding factor is patient safety. To make sure that you have a safe treatment, staff may not be able to satisfy all of your comfort requests, such as keeping the access site covered for warmth.

There have been far too many reports of venous needles falling out - down into the chair or underneath it, while the patient is asleep, covered with a blanket. The alarms on the machine may not sound and stop the blood pump if the pressure does not change. At pump speeds greater than 350 ml/minutes, a patient can lose a unit of blood in less than one minute.

Losing a large volume of blood quickly will cause blood pressure to drop, causing a loss of consciousness, and even death. Therefore, the safest thing that can be done for monitoring your dialysis access is to look at the access, not only when the staff is checking your vital signs, but continuously during your treatment.

Regulations

In order to do this, **your access needs to be visible (seen) at all times.** The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) agree, and have made visible accesses a requirement during dialysis in the new Conditions for Coverage (CfC).

But, CMS also tells us that staff have to make sure you are comfortable during dialysis. The CfC states:

"The dialysis facility must: 1) Maintain a comfortable temperature within the facility, and 2) make reasonable accommodations for the patients who are not comfortable at this temperature."

So, there has to be a way of balancing safety and patient comfort.



LEARNING POINTS

Covering your access puts you at risk.

Staff will work with you to make you comfortable and safe.

RELATED WEB RESOURCES

American Association of
Kidney Patients
www.aakp.org

Fistula First
www.fistulafirst.org

Kidney School
www.kidneyschool.org

Northwest Renal Network
4702 42nd Ave SW
Seattle, WA 98116
206.923.0714
Fax 206.923.0716

**Patient
Toll-Free Number**
1.800.262.1514

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www.nwrenalnetwork.org

THE BUTTONHOLE TECHNIQUE

What is the buttonhole technique?

The Buttonhole Technique is another way of cannulating (putting needles in) your fistula where the needles are put in the exact same spot, at the same angle, and depth every dialysis treatment.

Is the buttonhole technique a new procedure?

The buttonhole technique has been used on AV fistulas in Europe and Japan for more than 30 years.

Because there is little to no pain when using buttonhole cannulation, patients are able to learn to self-cannulate using this technique.

In the Northwest Renal Network, nurses and technicians have been using the Buttonhole Technique for about 10 years, and is now becoming very popular across the United States.

Why would I want the buttonhole technique used on my fistula?

Research has shown that there are:

- Fewer infiltrations (swelling from the needle going through the fistula wall).
- Fewer missed attempts to place needles.
- Less pain when inserting needles.

This technique may help your fistula last for a very long time. There are dialysis patients who have been using this technique for over 20 years with the same AV fistula!

Can I use the buttonhole technique on my access?

This technique is only for use with AV fistulas, not grafts. Check with your nephrologist or dialysis nurse to see if this technique would work for your access. For a flyer about this technique, go to: www.nwrenalnetwork.org/P/PtEdMaterials.htm#_Vascular_Access

Ideas for keeping your accesses visible and keeping you warm include:

- use a second, smaller blanket or towel to cover the exposed part of your arm or leg above or below the access;
- wear a mitten (not a glove), or a tube sock on your access hand;
- cut a hole in a blanket where the access is located;
- ask to be moved away from drafty areas;
- ask the staff to set the thermostat to a reasonable temperature;
- talk with the dialysis facility about the possibility of buying radiant heat panels above each dialysis chair.

Do not use heating pads, electric blankets, hot water bottles, or gloves filled with hot water. Patients who have diabetes are at very high risk for skin damage because they may have decreased sensation, and may not be able to tell if the item is too hot for their skin.

Keeping you safe is the most important goal and responsibility of the nurses and technicians. To make sure that happens, all dialysis accesses need to be visible during your treatment. And, with a little creativity, staff can provide for your comfort as well.

Lynda Ball is the Quality Improvement Director for Northwest Renal Network in Seattle, WA, and is a nationally recognized vascular access expert. She has authored numerous articles on cannulation, including the Buttonhole Technique, and teaches across the country.

