



**Fistulas provide better dialysis.**  
**Fistulas have fewer complications.**  
**Fistulas have fewer infections. Fistulas are linked to fewer hospitalizations.**  
**Fistulas last longer.**



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Produced by The Patient Leadership Committee  
And published under CMS contracts  
HHSM-500-2006-NW 009C &  
HHSM-500-2006-NW 010C

**HOW  
DO I  
LOOK?**

**Taking the fear  
out of AV Fistula  
Placement**

**A Discussion Guide  
for Patients,  
Family Members  
and Healthcare Staff**

## How Do I Look?

**Body image** is how you see and feel about your physical appearance.

**Self-esteem** involves how much a person values him/herself and appreciates his/her own worth and importance. We tend to relate self-esteem to body image for several reasons.

- People care about how other people see them.
- People want to fit in and not stand out or appear different.
- People feel judged and evaluated according to their looks (height, weight, grooming, clothing).

For the kidney patient, body image may be a serious matter affecting both their attitude and sense of well-being. It may even be a major contributing factor to depression.

Patients may refuse or postpone an AV Fistula placement because of concerns about body image.

## How Will I Look?

Some issues people may have when considering an AV fistula placement include:

- The appearance of scar tissue resulting from the surgery.
- The appearance of “bulging veins” at the access site.

### Cope with the Feelings

Do not feel embarrassed expressing your concerns about how the fistula will look. Talk to your social worker about the way you are feeling.

### Focus on the Facts

Talk to your vascular surgeon about the size of the surgical incision (in most cases about 2 - 4 inches long).

Discuss with your nephrologist and health care team what to expect as the fistula matures.

### *For example:*

- Some change occurs naturally as the AV fistula matures. The vein wall thickens and increases in

diameter. Eventually the vein grows strong enough to stand up to the increased pressure of the arterial blood flow needed for adequate dialysis.

- Bulging of the vein does not occur naturally as part of the AV fistula maturation. It may occur as a result of an aneurysm, a weak spot in the arterial wall causing the access to balloon out. The risk of developing an aneurysm can be reduced by careful needle or cannulation technique.

### Stay Informed

- Ask about new cannulation techniques, such as the buttonhole method.
- Ask about self-cannulation (learning to place the access needles yourself) as a way to preserve the AV fistula.
- Learn about AV fistula care and monitoring.
- Talk to other patients about how they coped with the physical changes on a day-to-day basis.

**Take time to celebrate what makes you unique and special. And remember that your worth is not defined by your access.**