

# The Naked Arm



Are the nurses at your dialysis unit constantly nagging you about uncovering your arm so your fistula is exposed? Are you tired of hearing them and explaining that your arm gets cold so you want it covered up? Do you understand why they want your arm uncovered? It is not because they just want to harass you. There really is a good reason!! They need to keep an eye on your vascular access.



Many complications can occur during hemodialysis. One potential complication could be the dialysis blood tubing could become disconnected. During dialysis, one tubing removes blood from your body and the other returns the blood after running through the dialysis machine. This blood moves rapidly through the system, often at speeds of 500cc per minute. The faster the blood circulates, the more blood goes through the dialyzer (artificial kidney) and the better you are dialyzed. You can imagine how quickly the blood will be lost if the tubing were to come apart. If this

has ever happened to you during dialysis you know what I am talking about.

Here's another way to help you understand. Your body contains approximately 5000cc of blood. If your dialysis machine is pumping blood at 500cc per minute and would become disconnected, well you do the math! All your blood could be drained from your body in just 10 minutes. If not discovered quickly, you would soon be unconscious.

Nobody wants this to happen to you! This is why your nurses want you to keep your access arm uncovered so they can keep an eye on it. If the tubing does become disconnected, they will be able to see it much quicker than if it was covered up with blankets. If this does happen to you during your dialysis, notify a nurse or technician immediately! You can also grab the end of the tubing yourself and clamp it so you lose as little blood as possible.



Now you ask, what are you supposed to do about your arm getting cold? Be creative! You can wear a glove to keep your hand warm. You can cover up the rest of your body with warm clothing and/or a blanket if your facility allows you to have one. The only part of your access that needs to be exposed is the area where the needles are inserted and the tubing is connected. Everything else can be covered. Depending on where your access is located will determine how you can cover it. Some patients with sewing skills have cut a slit in a long sleeve shirt and sewed a zipper in it for access. See what you can come up with to keep you warm and allow the staff to see your access at the same time.

The message of this story is to keep your access arm uncovered! Help make your dialysis treatment as safe as possible.

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