



GEE LONG VASCULAR SERVICE

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POST OPERATIVE CARE FOLLOWING CREATION OF AN ARTERIOVENOUS FISTULA FOR DIALYSIS

These notes are intended to assist you in your care following discharge from hospital after fistula creation for dialysis.

- Wound care:** In most cases your wound will be confined to a small incision at the level of your wrist or elbow crease. The skin incision will have been closed with dissolving sutures, which do not need to be removed, and covered with an occlusive dressing. This dressing will often be replaced before you leave hospital, after which the new dressing should remain in place for 3-4 days. It should be safe to shower with your dressing intact, after which you should pat the area dry with a towel. After 3-4 days the edges of your dressing will begin to lift and you can remove it safely at that time. A mild amount of bruising and swelling at the operative site is not uncommon. If this is excessive, however, please contact our service.
- Pain Control:** It is uncommon to have excessive pain following your fistula operation. An ache in your arm should be adequately controlled with 2 Panadol tablets, which you may take up to four hourly, if required.
- Fistula Care:** You should be able to feel a buzzing sensation in your fistula after its creation. Being able to detect this thrill will assure you that your fistula is working well. You should check this formally at least once a day. If you notice that your buzz or thrill is absent please contact us urgently. This may indicate that your fistula has thrombosed. It is imperative that you avoid anything that may cause compression of your fistula. Do not wear a watch on your fistula arm. Avoid tight clothing over the fistula. You should not have your blood pressure recorded from the arm unless it is performed during dialysis. You should try to avoid sleeping or lying on your operated arm as this may compress your fistula, and you should avoid carrying heavy objects over the arm (like a handbag, or shopping bag) as this may compress your fistula. The use of a squeeze ball is often recommended to help fistula maturation over the first six postoperative weeks. Regular activity of the hand, as in squeezing a soft ball, will increase arterial supply to the muscles of your arm and thereby increase blood flow through your fistula. This should help it develop to a size that makes it ready for dialysis puncture.
- Care of your fistula during dialysis:** Before each dialysis puncture it is important that you wash your arm with soap and water. A different needle puncture should be used with each subsequent dialysis run, unless you have been advised to develop a "button hole" for access. Any redness, pain, rash, skin breakdown, or hotness along the length of the fistula should be reported immediately. You should take care to avoid scratching or injuring the arm that houses your fistula, remembering that it is your dialysis lifeline.
- Discharge:** At the time of your discharge from hospital you will be given a six weeks review appointment to see A/Prof David McClure. An ultrasound of your fistula will be undertaken prior to that visit. If there is any problem with your operated arm during that interval please let us know.

I trust your hospital stay was a pleasant one. Our staff at Geelong Vascular Service will be happy to handle any concerns you may have should you need to call Monday to Friday 09.00 – 16.30 hours.

Yours sincerely,

A/Prof David McClure
Vascular & Endovascular Surgeon