



# Your Tunneled Catheter

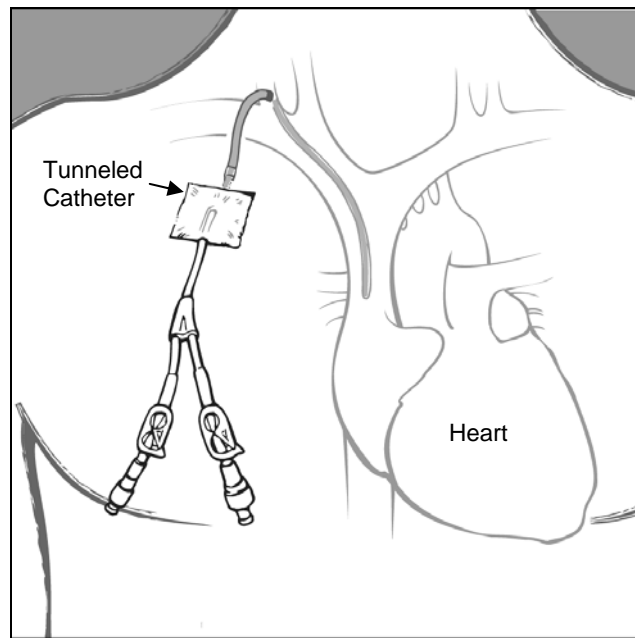
*About hemodialysis and plasma exchange catheters*

**This handout gives information about tunneled catheters, which are used for hemodialysis or plasma exchange. Included are basic care instructions, signs of infection to watch for, and when to call the doctor.**

You have a *tunneled catheter* for hemodialysis or plasma exchange. The tunneled catheter is a catheter that is fixed in place when scar tissue forms. It can be used for weeks or months.

The catheter is placed into a large vein in your neck that returns blood to your heart. It is then tunneled down your chest wall, going out through your skin about 6 inches from where it entered your vein.

Follow the care instructions in this handout to keep the catheter from clotting and to prevent infection.



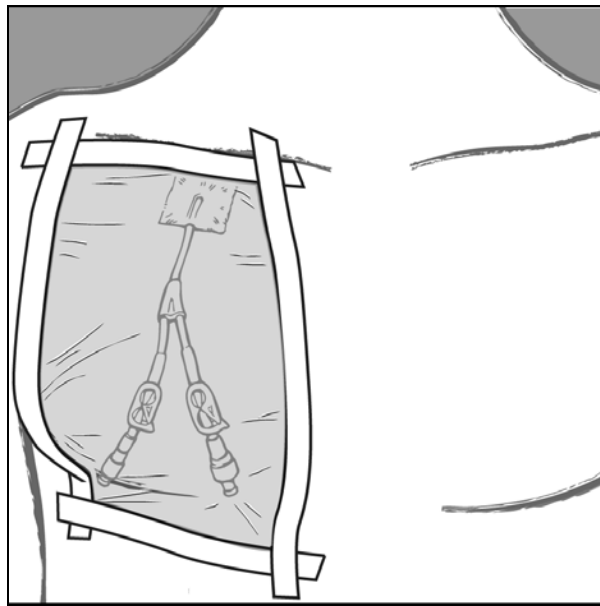
Placement of a tunneled catheter

When you change your dressing, check your site for any sign of infection or catheter damage. If these problems are found early, they can likely be resolved.

- Look for any redness, swelling, drainage, or moisture.
- Gently feel for any swelling or tenderness.
- The catheter should be intact, caps in place, and both ports clamped.

## Basic Catheter Care

- Keep the catheter site as clean as possible to prevent infection.
- Keep both ports of the catheter **clamped at all times**.
- Do **NOT** pull on the catheter.
- Do **not** take a bath, soak in a hot tub, or go swimming.
- When you take a shower, cover the entire catheter and dressing site with a plastic sheet and tape the edges (see the picture below). Remove the plastic cover right after your shower. Change the dressing right away if it gets wet.
- If you are bleeding from the catheter site or if the catheter falls out, **apply pressure** at the site and go to an emergency room.



Covering the catheter with plastic

## Catheter Dressing Change

- I need to change my dressing every 3 days *or* when it is wet or loose.
- I need to change my dressing *only* if it becomes wet or loose. Otherwise, the staff at University of Washington Medical Center or my dialysis center will change my dressing.

## Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC 4-Southeast Nurses are also available to help.

- Renal Nurse:  
206-598-2844
- Neurology Nurse:  
206-598-7688
- Transplant Nurse:  
206-598-4773
- 4-Southeast  
Transplant  
Surgery/Renal  
Medicine:  
206-598-4400

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### *Follow these steps to change your dressing:*

1. Prepare these supplies:
  - ChloroPrep
  - 2" x 2" gauze
  - Transparent dressing
2. Put on a mask.
3. Wash your hands with soap and water.
4. Remove the old dressing.
5. Clean the catheter site with ChloroPrep and let it dry for 30 seconds.
6. Apply 2" x 2" gauze and then the transparent dressing.

### **When to Call Your Doctor**

Infection is the most common complication of tunneled catheters. Germs from your hands, mouth, and surroundings can get into your catheter. This can cause you to become very ill and your catheter to fail.

#### **Call your doctor right away if you think you might have any of these signs of infection:**

- Fever or chills.
- Redness, warmth, drainage, or swelling at the catheter site.
- New onset of pain.

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