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Choosing to stop dialysis

Patient Information



Working together for better patient information

There may be a time while receiving long term dialysis treatment when patients think about stopping treatment. This leaflet will discuss what can happen if you stop dialysis. If you are thinking about stopping dialysis, it is helpful to talk to your doctors and nurses who can provide support and advice.

I'm already on dialysis and feel that I don't want to have any more treatments, can I stop?

Sometimes dialysis no longer allows you to have the quality of life that you want. You may experience difficult symptoms that are not getting better. It might be a struggle to get to and from dialysis or you might have other health conditions that are getting worse.

If you feel like this, let your doctors and nurses know. They may be able to help by changing your dialysis, talk to you about how to help with your symptoms and provide you with support as you come to your decision. It is your choice and no-one will make you carry on with dialysis if you don't want to.

I have decided to stop dialysis, what happens next?

If you have decided that you would like to stop dialysis, the kidney team will continue to look after and support you. They can also access advice from other specialists in looking after people towards the end of their life, known as the palliative care team. We recognise that often patients, and family members, may need emotional support as well as medical help. You may need additional medicines to help manage symptoms if needed. The team will discuss this with your GP.

It may be helpful to have a think about dying, what your wishes are and where you would like to be looked after at this time. Some people might want to be at home whereas others may prefer to be in hospice.

Through these discussions you can make a plan for what would be best for you. This is known as advance care or end of life planning.

How long will I live once I stop dialysis?

It can vary depending on how long you have been on dialysis. If you have been on long term dialysis, you will normally die within a few weeks as you depend on dialysis to provide you with kidney function. If you have not been on dialysis for very long or you still pass urine, you may live longer than that. Your doctor may be able to advise depending on your own individual circumstances. In the end, you become drowsy and will slip into a coma. It is usually peaceful and free of suffering.

Is stopping dialysis the same as committing suicide?

You may worry that deciding to stop dialysis is the same as committing suicide. This is not the case. Dialysis is a medical treatment and you always have the right to decide not to accept medical treatment. You may wish to discuss this further with your religious or spiritual advisor. All hospitals have religious advisors and your team can contact them for you.



What else should I think about when I've chosen to stop dialysis?

Some things you may wish to think about before you become unwell include:

- Making or checking your will, and considering a power of attorney so that someone can make decisions on your behalf
- Making funeral arrangements and decisions about organ and tissue donation
- Thinking about a living will and discussing this with your GP who can support you to ensure that your wishes are respected.
- Making a list of important contacts, your financial accounts, insurance plans, pensions and other legal papers

It can be daunting to think about this. You may find it helpful to talk to your GP. The palliative care team can be very helpful. You may also need advice from a social worker to help with housing, social and financial issues.


Where can I find out more information?

- NHS Choices website - End of life care:
www.nhs.uk/planners/end-of-life-care/pages/end-of-life-care.aspx



 www.kidneycareuk.org

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