Hemodialysis Treatment Time

When You Start Treatment

As You Prepare for Dialysis, it is important for you to realize healthy kidneys work 24 hours a day to keep waste and fluid from building up in your body. That is 168 hours a week. If your kidneys fail and you choose hemodialysis, most patients dialyze about 12 hours a week. Dialysis is very effective but does not replace your kidneys. Most dialysis specialists think that longer hemodialysis treatments are better than shorter treatments.

Time on Dialysis is Important

Many dialysis specialists now say that all hemodialysis treatments should be at least 4 hours long. Longer dialysis times allow more gentle removal of your excess fluid and balancing your electrolytes. This is much easier on your heart and you will also feel better after dialysis.

Remember, you can help yourself feel better after dialysis and in-between dialysis treatments by staying on the machine for your whole treatment. If you have gained more fluid than we can safely remove in one treatment or if your lab values show you are not getting enough dialysis, please be willing to dialyze longer or add an extra treatment.

Shortened Treatments

While it may be tempting to shorten or skip a treatment, even shortening your treatment by 10 minutes puts you at a higher risk of dying. If you shorten each treatment by 10 minutes, over a month’s time you will miss more than 2 hours of dialysis time, or half a dialysis treatment. Dialysis is already only providing a fraction of what your healthy kidneys do, so decreasing your time can have a big impact on your health.

Fact:

During any month, each time you shorten your treatment by 10 minutes or more, you have an 11% increased risk of dying.

When you shorten your treatments, the damage that is done to your body may not make you feel bad that day. Over time the damage to your heart, brain and other vital organs slowly builds and may be much harder to treat.

Symptoms That May Occur from Shortened Treatments Are:

Itching, swelling, worsening of high blood pressure, nausea, vomiting, chest pain, feeling tired or weak, difficulty with sleeping, decreased appetite, nausea and vomiting, shortness of breath, sores on your skin, headache.
Missed Treatments

Missing one treatment decreases your dialysis time by at least 4 hours for that week. In the week you miss a treatment you are only dialyzing 8 hours compared to the 168 hours your kidneys would have provided you to do the same job. This means that the time to remove the fluid and waste that has built up in your blood is reduced by one-third.

You are also missing other important factors about your treatment, like medications you can only receive while on treatment. These medications are making up for things that your kidneys no longer do, so if you do not come to treatment, you may feel worse because you did not get these medications.

Every time you miss a dialysis treatment, you are more likely to go to the hospital.

Patients sometimes think that if they feel sick they should not come to treatment. In fact, it is probably even more important to come to your treatment so your healthcare team can assess you and get you the right care. Often the reason a patient on dialysis does not feel well is because he or she has not had enough dialysis.

Again, Time on Dialysis is Important!

Fact:
If you miss one treatment a month, you have a 14% higher risk of dying. If you miss more than one treatment per month, you have a 27% increased risk of dying.