

## Fistulogram – For Patients

### **What is a fistulogram?**

A fistulogram is a test to look for abnormal areas in your dialysis graft or arterio-venous fistula that may be causing problems with your dialysis. These may include areas of blocked veins or arteries (occlusion), abnormal narrowing (stenosis), or areas of abnormal enlargement (pseudoaneurysm).

### **What shall I do in preparation for the procedure?**

It is important that you not eat anything for at least 8 hours before the procedure as the X-ray dye and medication make some people feel nauseated.

### **How long will the procedure last?**

The procedure usually takes between 30 minutes and one hour.

### **Will I be put to sleep (under anesthesia) during the procedure?**

No. You will receive some sedation and pain control medication if you need it during the procedure.

### **What should I expect during the procedure?**

It is only slightly more uncomfortable than your usually dialysis punctures. Because this is a minimally invasive procedure, your access site will be cleaned and draped with sterile sheets. The Radiologist will then numb the skin over your access and place a small tube called a catheter in your graft. X-ray dye is then injected and pictures are taken of your graft. We also measure the pressure in the graft because high pressures can alert us to any significant narrowing. If an area of abnormal narrowing is seen, we will usually treat it by placing a small balloon in the graft and stretching the narrowed area open – angioplasty. If the angioplasty is not successful, you will be referred to a surgeon for a graft revision. Sometimes a small metal tube called a stent may be placed to help keep the narrowed area open. At the end of the procedure the catheter is removed and pressure is held over the puncture site.

### **How often can I have a fistulogram?**

The fistulogram and possible angioplasty can be repeated as often as needed to help keep your graft or fistula open. This is a safe, commonly performed procedure.

### **What are the complications and risk factors?**

The most common complications are allergy to x-ray dye and bleeding. There is also a slight risk of infection, and even smaller risk of circulation problems.

### **What should I expect after the procedure?**

It is important to have a responsible adult to drive you home. Hospital rules require that you are accompanied by someone in order to receive pain medication during the procedure (many people do not need any pain medication). If you did not receive any pain medication, then you may drive yourself home. After the procedure we will watch you for a short time and then send you home or to dialysis.

## What are the instructions after the procedure?

- You may resume your previous diet, medications and activities.
- If bleeding from your fistula/graft should occur, apply pressure to the site and hold until the bleeding stops. If bleeding does not stop after 15 minutes or it cannot be controlled with mild to moderate pressure over the site, then continue to apply pressure and call 911 or, if minimal bleeding or have a question, then call the Heart and Vascular Center at 205-996-6800 or Interventional Radiology at 205-934-0152 (alternative 205-934-7245). For nights and weekends, call 911.
- Call the Vascular Center if you have fever, chills, pain or redness over the graft/fistula, or if your fingers or hand on the side of the graft/fistula (toes or feet for thigh grafts) become cold, painful, or blue.
- You may take Tylenol for pain if not allergic: 1 to 2 tabs every 6 hours as needed for pain. Most likely you will experience minimal to no pain. If it is worse than mild pain (as an example if the pain is greater than 3 on a 10 pain scale) or it is changing for the worse, call us for instructions or go to the Emergency Department.
- Do **NOT** wear anything tight around the graft/fistula arm or leg, this includes clothing and jewelry.
- Do **NOT** hang purses or shopping bags from the graft/fistula arm.
- Do **NOT** allow blood pressures to be taken on the graft/fistula arm.
- Do **NOT** allow anyone except dialysis personnel stick needles of any kind in the graft/fistula.
- Feel for the thrill every day. The thrill is the vibration you feel over the fistula that means the blood is flowing through it. If you cannot feel the thrill, call the Dialysis unit.
- For any questions or concerns, call the Vascular Center.

Continue going to dialysis as scheduled and continue taking your same medications as prescribed by your doctor(s). Continue following up with your doctor(s).

## If I have other questions, who do I contact?

For further questions or concerns about having a fistulogram, please contact Interventional Radiology at 205-934-0152, 205-934-7245, 205-975-4850.