Lifestyle Changes on Dialysis

Most people on dialysis treatments for end-stage renal disease (ESRD) have many changes in their routines and relationships. The Dialysis Center staff will help you learn how to make the needed changes to make you healthier.

Changes that *may occur* after you start dialysis treatments are discussed in this handout. We say *may* because no two people respond to dialysis the same way. Ask questions and talk with your doctor, nurse practitioner, primary nurse, technicians, dietitian and social worker.

**Body Changes**

Dialysis can sometimes produce changes in your body and in your appearance.

- **Dry skin and brittle hair**
  
  You may need to use a milder soap or shampoo or skin lotions. Some people have constant itching. If you have itching, talk to your nurses and doctors. They may recommend changes in your diet or certain medicines.

- **Bruises**

  You may have a tendency to bruise and need to change how you do certain tasks. Wear gloves when gardening and long sleeves when doing heavy physical work. Your skin may sunburn or tan more easily. Do not stop doing things you enjoy, but be more careful to protect your skin.

More on next page ➤
• **Dry mouth and bad breath**

  When you restrict the amount of fluid you drink, a dry mouth is common. Rinse your mouth with cold mouth wash or water. Chewing gum or sucking on sugar-free candy may help. If you find other ways to deal with a dry mouth, please share them with your nurses and technicians. Your advice will be useful to other patients.

**Weight Changes**

A difficult adjustment you may need to make is dealing with changes in your weight. Every time you come to dialysis you will be weighed.

- The dialysis staff is concerned about your weight, because weight gain determines how much fluid to remove during dialysis treatment. Your "dry weight" will be determined by your doctor and nurses. Dry weight is your estimated weight without extra fluid.

- When your kidneys start to put out less fluid than you take in, fluid begins to build up in your body. Medicines will not remove the extra fluid because of your kidney disease. Dialysis can remove most of this extra fluid, but not all.

- Large weight changes can cause blood pressure changes, headaches, leg cramps, breathing problems and other concerns. To prevent these problems, try to gain less than 2 to 2 ½ pounds of fluid a day. You may need to drink or eat less than 4 to 5 cups of fluid a day for this to occur. If you are able to urinate, you may be able to drink more fluid.

- You may lose body weight before starting dialysis treatments due to your illness. After you start to feel better, you may have a better appetite, eat better, and gain weight. It is rare to gain more than 1 to 2 pounds a week of actual body weight.

- The Dialysis staff knows that fluid restrictions are difficult, but the responsibility of controlling your fluid intake really depends on you. You will feel better if you follow your fluid restriction. Be patient with yourself, but also learn how to control fluids.
Time Changes

Dialysis treatments take time and commitment from you. Bring items with you to treatment, such as a book or magazine, letters to write, playing cards or personal audio players.

Think of dialysis treatments as a part-time job. You need to do it to pay for improved health and to do the activities you and your family enjoy.

Changes in Energy and Stamina

You may have a decrease in energy before dialysis treatments. Patients on hemodialysis often feel "blah" the evening before dialysis and tired or "rung out" after dialysis. After several weeks of dialysis, your energy should improve. You will also learn to adjust your activities around your dialysis schedule. Many patients are able to resume many of their previous activities, including returning to work or other enjoyable pursuits.

- You may become tired if you have too much fluid or are too dry.
- You may have a low blood count (anemia), which adds to being tired. You may also have problems sleeping even though you feel tired. Tell the staff of any problems or changes that you notice.
- Your doctor may prescribe medicines that can help your tiredness and sleeping problems.
- Things you can do to help yourself:
  - Check for patterns to your energy levels and plan activities at peak energy times.
  - Limit your fluids.
  - Plan for periods of rest in your schedule. Do not take daylight naps, which may keep you from sleeping at night.
  - Exercise increases your energy level. Do light exercise, such as walking or cycling, 3 times a week.
  - Limit lifting to 10 to 15 pounds. This is about the weight of a gallon of milk and a small bag of groceries.
**Changes in Activities**

Changes in lifestyle may alter how you spend your time. You may be able to return to work. You may want to try new activities or hobbies to fill your day.

- If you work, talk with your employer about your options for flexible schedules, full or part-time work, working from home, changing job responsibilities, and use of sick disability time.
- Find activities you enjoy. Volunteer or find a hobby.
- Reduce stress by focusing on what you **can do, not what you cannot do**. Most activities can be modified to your needs.
- Break activities down into steps so that you can see progress and not get frustrated.
- Ask family, friends, or support groups to share in activities with you.

**Changes in Your Sex Drive and Habits**

Changes in your energy level, leisure time, medicines and stress may also affect your sexual drive and habits. If you have problems or questions, talk to your primary nurse, dialysis staff or your doctor.

- Sexually active couples should discuss birth control with the doctor. Persons on dialysis can become pregnant or father children.
- Some blood pressure medicines interfere with sexual desire and performance. If you have this problem, talk to your doctor.
- Sexual desire and performance will be most successful if you follow your patterns of energy. You may have greater success when you are rested in the morning or in the evening the day after dialysis.
- Communication between sexual partners is important. Discuss the changes in your life with your partner. Partners are not mind readers.

Life can still be very satisfying and wonderful with end stage renal disease (ESRD). Remember, you have spent your life coping with big and small changes. Have confidence in your ability to adapt and talk with family, friends and the dialysis staff for more support.