

# What you should know about KIDNEY DIALYSIS

## What is dialysis?

Healthy kidneys regulate the blood pressure and filter waste from the body. Dialysis is a mechanical process that cleans waste and extra fluid from the blood when kidneys fail. Just like healthy kidneys, dialysis keeps the body in balance by maintaining safe fluid and chemical levels in the bloodstream.

## What are the benefits?

Some forms of kidney failure are temporary and may get better. Short-term dialysis allows the kidneys to rest and recover. Dialysis also prevents excess urine, salt, and other dangerous chemicals from building up in the body. Patients who suffer from chronic or end stage kidney failure can live for many years with the help of dialysis.

## What are the risks?

The process of dialysis involves circulating the blood out of the body into a machine which cleans it and returns it back to the body. When the machine removes the 'bad' chemicals from the bloodstream, it can also remove many of the body's nutrients and 'good' chemicals, resulting in headaches, weakness, and anemia.

Before you can begin dialysis, doctors must create a place in your arm where they can connect the dialysis machine to your body; germs from outside the body can enter this

opening and cause infection. Although the treatment itself is painless, dialysis can cause your blood pressure to drop and may make you feel nauseated and dizzy.

## What does this mean for me?

You should know that dialysis does not cure kidney disease. While dialysis can improve the lives of otherwise healthy patients whose kidneys are failing, it does not usually benefit those who are very old or

have serious health complications. It is important to know that, in cases where additional treatment may prevent you from experiencing a peaceful, natural death, you have the right to decide not to start dialysis.

## Do I have a choice?

Yes, you have the right to control your own health care decisions. If you want to receive dialysis, you should think about specific instances when you will and will not want treatment. Whatever you decide, talk first with your family and doctor.

This brochure was designed to give a general description of dialysis, some pros and cons of

the treatment, and an outline of your options for choosing whether or not you want dialysis to be a part of your Advance Care Plan.

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## What is Advance Care Planning?

Advance care planning is a thoughtful process used to plan for future healthcare choices. It involves personal reflection and discussions with loved ones and healthcare providers. Your plan should include both a Living Will and the designation of a Healthcare Surrogate who can make decisions on your behalf if you're unable to speak for yourself.

The best time to think and talk about future medical decisions is when you are *well*, rather than in a time of medical crisis.

## Why should I have an Advance Care Plan?

Advances in medicine and technology have given us the ability to sustain life through artificial or mechanical interventions. In cases where patients are terminally ill with no hope of recovery, these interventions can prolong the dying process and prevent them from experiencing a peaceful, natural death.

By establishing an Advance Care Plan while you are well, you can make sure that your wishes are honored later, should you become unable to speak for yourself.

## Does an Advance Care Plan encourage my death?

**NO.** You are not signing an agreement that says that you wish to die. You are making a choice for the future, about the kind of medical treatment you wish to receive when there is little or no hope for recovery.

### Advance Care Planning Helps:

**YOU** make treatment decisions that can affect your life.

**YOUR FAMILY** have peace of mind knowing your decisions.

**YOUR PHYSICIAN** by providing information about the kind of care you want.

## How can Empath Choices for Care help me?

Empath Choices for Care provides advance care planning services, free of charge, to anyone who wishes to communicate their future medical treatment decisions. Our living will is used by many hospital systems across the country. It is acceptable to doctors and easily understood by the public.

Empath Choices for Care is a program of Empath Health that was established through a partnership of physicians, elder care providers and community citizens. Our focus is providing holistic and compassionate advance care planning that respects human dignity, as well as each individual's best interests and personal wishes.



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