



## Advance Care Planning Information:

# Dialysis

### Advance Care Planning

Knowing your voice is heard when making decisions about health care is important.

Advance care planning is the process of preparing for a time when you may not be able to make your own medical decisions. The best time to make these decisions is when you are able to make your own choices.

### Health Care Agent

Discussing and sharing your wishes with your loved ones, health care team, and health care agent is important. A health care agent makes health care decisions based on your wishes if you are unable to communicate.

### Health Care Directive

By writing a health care directive, you can make your voice heard so your wishes are followed. A health care directive is a written plan outlining your values and priorities for your future medical treatment.

### What is dialysis?

Dialysis is a process that cleans waste from your blood when your kidneys can no longer do the job. It is not a cure, but it can help you feel better and live longer.

### How is dialysis done?

You are connected to a special machine so that your blood can travel from your body, through a filter, and then back into your body. It usually takes four to six hours. Many people need dialysis two to four times a week. Often people come to a dialysis center, though in some cases the dialysis equipment may be set up in your home.

### How effective is dialysis?

It depends on why you need it.

- If your kidneys are not working because of an injury that is treatable, it is likely that dialysis will work well and be temporary.
- If you need dialysis because of ongoing kidney failure, you will be faced with either seeing if a kidney transplant is possible for you, or being on dialysis for the rest of your life.

Risks of dialysis include:

- Infection
- Problems with blood vessels
- Sudden cardiac death

Life expectancy on dialysis can vary depending on other medical conditions you may have.

### Will dialysis work for me?

Talk with your clinician about your exact situation. Dialysis may help you feel more comfortable and allow you to live longer. Or, it may be a process that helps for a while but does not affect your overall health. You may try dialysis for a set period of time to see how you do.

### What if I choose not to have dialysis?

Death will occur within a few weeks if your kidneys can no longer clean your blood. If you choose not to have dialysis, your healthcare team will provide other treatments to keep you comfortable, manage pain and control symptoms so you can live as well as possible.

## How do I decide what's best for me?

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Talk with your clinician and your loved ones about your medical and personal goals and values. Ask for more detailed information on kidney failure and dialysis if you would like to learn more. Some questions to consider are:

- How do I feel about having dialysis several times each week?
- What other health problems do I have which affect my kidney failure?
- Are these problems curable?
- What is my quality of life now with my kidney problems?
- What changes to my situation would affect my decision about dialysis?

## What should I do after I decide?

Let loved ones know your decision about dialysis so they can honor your choice. Be sure to document your choices about dialysis in a Health Care Directive.

Also talk about your decision with your doctor and health care team. Your health care provider may recommend medical orders called *POLST (Provider Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment)* that document your choices about dialysis and other health care wishes.

POLST provides specific instructions for emergency medical responders and other health care providers. A POLST form is not a replacement for a Health Care Directive and does not name a health care agent.

Remember, your goals, values and priorities may change. Your health status may change, too. Revisit your decision about dialysis as you get older or your health changes.

*For more information about advance care planning or for help creating a Health Care Directive, contact your health care provider or Advanced Care Planning of North Dakota*

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