

Basics of Self-cannulation

Welcome! By the end of this course, you will know how self-cannulation can help you. We assume you have a working fistula or graft.

Words to Know:

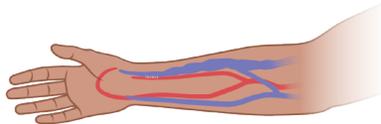
Cannulate: Place needles for hemodialysis (HD).

Fistula: A surgeon links an artery to a vein. This is done under the skin of your arm.

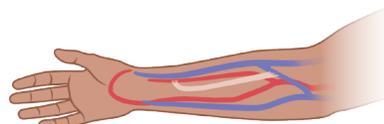
Graft: A piece of man-made tubing links an artery to a vein. This is done under the skin.

Self-cannulate: To place your own needles.

Vascular access: A way to reach your blood so it can be cleaned.



Fistula



Graft

Get Used to Your Access:

- Look at and touch your access. Part of self-cannulating is learning to accept your arm. Your access is your lifeline.
- Start by holding your needle sites after treatment.

What's in it For You to do This?

- It hurts much less to put in your own needles. Our brains can only focus on one thing at a time. When you focus on placing the needles, you feel less pain.
- You are the only one on earth who can feel both ends of your HD needles. So, you can be your own best cannulator.
- Placing your own needles may help your access last much longer.
- Travel can be less stressful when you place your own needles.
- YOU can place your needles as fast or slow as YOU like.

You Have a Right to Self-cannulate.

Self-cannulation Myths and Facts:

Myth	Fact
<i>"I'll never be able to put in my own needles, I can't even look at them!"</i>	It is possible to get past needle fear—and life is much less stressful when you do. Learn how from the Overcoming Needle Fear eClass.
<i>"My access is in my writing arm, so I won't be able to put in my own needles."</i>	If your other hand works, you can learn to self-cannulate with your other hand.
<i>"I can't quite see what I'm aiming for. It's too risky for me to put in my own needles."</i>	Put a Sharpie® dot on your arm. Try a few strengths of reading glasses until you can see it.

Before You Start: Learn to **look, listen, and feel.**

- **Look** for new bumps or bruises. Is your skin color normal? Any signs of infection like redness, warmth, pain, pus, swelling, itching, fever or chills?
- **Listen** to the *bruit* “BREW-ee” sound. Tell your nurse if you hear changes.
- **Feel** your access. The *thrill* (buzz) should feel the same each day. Your skin and hand temperature should be normal, not too hot or cold.

Learn to Cannulate. Think of cannulation as a ritual. It needs to be done the same way each time. Don't rely on memory. Make “Recipe Cards” for the supplies you need. Get everything lined up and ready to go. Follow the steps on the cards to set up for each treatment.

Is fear of pain slowing you down? Try a pain relief cream like EMLA®.



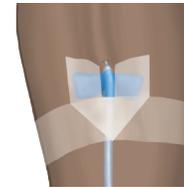
Placing needles can be extra stressful for care partners. They have the added fear of hurting you. This is one of many good reasons to self-cannulate—even if you fear needles at first.

Practice Safe Needle Taping.

You will learn a technique called *chevron* or *butterfly taping*. Both of these wrap tape all the way around the needle tubing to keep the needle in place.



Chevron



Butterfly

Ask Your Nurse for a Blunt Needle to Take Home. Try to “cannulate” plastic tubing. Get a sense of the needle inside the hollow tube. Find cannulation sites on your arm. Tap the point of the needle against those spots.

Conclusion: You *can* learn to place your own needles. Doing so can improve your self-esteem and give you back control over your health. You are the best person to place needles well, because you are the only one who can feel both ends. You can do this!