



Seeing Yourself in a Positive Light with a Peritoneal Dialysis Catheter



What is body image?

Body image is how a person perceives, thinks and feels about their body. A person's body image could be positive or negative or both. What's important to remember is that our body image may not be directly related to our actual appearance; we tend to focus on our minor imperfections that others do not even notice.

Having kidney failure is going to make changes to your body. This is partly due to your body's inability to get rid of chemicals that your kidneys are no longer able to remove and also due to the procedures you will undergo to make sure that your body is able to remove those chemicals through other means.

If you and your doctors determine that dialysis is the best treatment for you—whether you are using a catheter, graft, or fistula—you will need to undergo a procedure that will leave a mark on your body. Even receiving a transplant will leave a scar. It is important for you to know about these changes and work on a plan to keep a positive outlook, so you can make the best choices for your care.

Some people worry that doing dialysis at home, which may involve a catheter in the stomach, will affect their body image. However, those concerns may be overcome by learning as much as you can about how this treatment is done and the benefits of this type of dialysis, called peritoneal dialysis.

Overcoming body image issues.

It is important to consider your concerns about body image and how you can work through them to experience the benefits of peritoneal dialysis.

- Peritoneal dialysis is daily, so you can eat and drink more and may require fewer medications to help you between your dialysis treatments than you would with other treatments.
- The therapy is gentler to your body than other treatments, reducing stress on your heart and blood vessels, which has been shown to reduce hospitalizations for individuals on this treatment.
- It is easier to carry out your daily activities as well as work and travel.
- You can swim! Swimming is recommended in either sea water or private swimming pools as long as you follow the recommendations of your home nurse on exit site care.
- If you get back to these activities, it will help improve your mood and make you feel better overall.



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What body image issues do people on peritoneal dialysis experience?

- Weight gain. Some patients experience weight gain due to the sugar that is in the solution used in dialysis treatments. Talk with your doctor and dietician to help balance your prescription and your diet.
- Bloating and feeling full. The extra fluids in your stomach make you feel this way. Some people find it even makes them less hungry or able to eat. Often these feelings become less noticeable as your body adjusts. To help with mealtime, you can try to do your treatments after meals.
- Hernias. The insertion of the catheter can weaken the stomach muscles; the fluid puts pressure on the weakened muscles and can cause a tear (hernia). Depending on how bad the hernia is you can have surgery to repair it.
- How the catheter looks hanging out of your stomach. In fact, the catheter tube is very small. However, if you are uncomfortable with how it looks, you can use a peritoneal dialysis catheter belt. Catheter belts help keep your peritoneal catheter tubing in place and make it less noticeable when wearing different types of clothing or bathing suits. They come in different types to suit all clothing options.

What are other ways to help you cope with peritoneal dialysis?

Consider the benefits of peritoneal dialysis over the changes to your body image and list ways you can work through the changes you'll be dealing with when you start peritoneal dialysis. That may include talking to your partner about your catheter and how you both feel about it. You might also want to talk to your friends and family about how you feel. And, if possible you may want to talk with someone who is currently on peritoneal dialysis.

Remember you are the person you were prior to being diagnosed with kidney disease. You will be the same person while on dialysis.

When you have a negative thought about your self-image, stop and identify that thought. You can write it down if you would like. Is this thought helpful or harmful? If this thought is hurtful to you, replace that thought with something that is positive.

If you have not considered peritoneal dialysis due to some of these concerns, please talk with a member of your dialysis team who can help you find the right resource to answer your questions.

To file a grievance, please contact us:

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