How to Prepare: Dialysis

Good habits around sessions make a real difference — these are the ones experienced patients swear by:

- ☐ You will be weighed at every haemodialysis session — the difference from your target ("dry") weight tells the team how much fluid to remove. Wear loose sleeves that give easy access to your fistula arm.
- ☐ Bring something for the hours: a book, a tablet, headphones, a blanket, and snacks if your unit allows them. Sessions are long, and comfortable patients dialyse better.
- ☐ Learn your fistula care: check the buzzing feeling (the "thrill") daily, keep the arm clean, and do not let anyone take blood or blood pressure from that arm unless the dialysis team agrees.
- ☐ Keep a list of your medicines and take them as the kidney team directs — some are timed around sessions, and doses often change once dialysis starts.
- ☐ Tell the unit before your session if you feel unwell — fever, breathlessness, chest symptoms, or problems with your fistula or catheter — rather than waiting until you arrive.
- ☐ Plan transport and rest: many people feel washed out for a few hours after haemodialysis, especially at first, so keep the rest of a dialysis day gentle.

What to expect

Before	At the unit you are weighed, your blood pressure and temperature are checked, and the nurse examines your fistula or line. The machine is prepared with your prescription — session length, fluid-removal target and settings chosen by your kidney team.
During	For haemodialysis, two needles are placed in the fistula (a sharp scratch; numbing cream or spray can be used) and connected to the machine. You will not see your blood leave and return in any dramatic way — the machine quietly does the work while you read, watch, chat or sleep.
After	The needles come out and you press on the sites until bleeding stops — usually about ten minutes — then you are weighed again and your blood pressure checked before you go home. It is normal to feel tired afterwards.

Medically reviewed by Dr. Mohamed Ibrahim, MD, PhD — physician-scientist. Last reviewed October 2026.

This handout is general information to help you prepare; it does not replace the instructions from your own care team. If your clinic gave you different instructions, follow theirs.