

Greetings from San Antonio, Texas



By Natalie Zuniga,
DPC Board Member

My name is Natalie Zuniga and I survived the 2021 Texas ice storm with my spouse, Eddie Zuniga, who is also a dialysis patient!

I have been a dialysis patient for over three years and my husband has been a dialysis patient for eight years. At first, we thought it was a death sentence and we were not going to live much longer, and we gave up. But then, by hard work and education through Dialysis Patient Citizens and our nutritionist, Mary, we are now thriving and enjoying life as seniors. We also are looking forward to bettering our lives with future kidney transplants.

We had a week that challenged us though, with a weather emergency that will go down in history. We live in Texas and the Texas ice storm in February 2021 was a freak occurrence. The last time it even snowed was in 1985, so we were not prepared for this major event.

On Monday, day one of the storm, my husband and I went slowly to our dialysis center while slipping and sliding; however, we made it there safely! Our medical team at DaVita Las Palmas were so dedicated that they all showed up. One tech said that he left his house at 2 am to make sure he made it by 5 am. Wow, that's dedication. They explained to us that we were only going to get two hours of treatment compared to our normal four hours. They also requested us to follow the renal diet and to monitor our water intake from 32 oz to just 16 oz because they did not know when our next treatment would be.

When we arrived back at our home, the electricity and water were no longer working. We live in a tiny home and have three fur babies, two of which prefer to sleep in their doghouse outside. I would let them out occasionally even though they were upset because they wanted to be outside, and the temperature was extremely cold. We snuggled in our comforters and my husband had a small generator to charge our phones. I could not turn on my CPAP machine, which helps me get a good night's sleep, and I felt exhausted most of the time.

We melted snow for our toilet use and our sponge baths. Our electricity was on periodically, but we would not get a heads up when it would go down. We did not eat salty meals or snacks to avoid getting thirsty. We did not open the refrigerator door to try to save our



perishables. Since the renal diet works on lean meats and fresh vegetables, we filled our ice chest with snow to save our meats. But mainly we ate canned tuna and turkey, which would not spoil.

On that Wednesday, we again showed up at our dialysis center for treatment. They started dialysis, but within 15 minutes, the facility lost water. The staff director explained that due to the lack of water they were not be able to continue our treatment. The only option was to go to the hospital if you felt bad. However, the hospitals were declining any patients unless it was a life-or-death situation due to the pandemic.

On Thursday, I could not take it any longer and we made a reservation at one of the only hotels that had electricity and water. I was able to shower and use my CPAP machine. I felt like a new person even though I had to continue to minimize my fluid intake.

Friday finally came and we received our full treatment. We still did not have water at home, even though my husband had made sure the pipes were covered. We attempted to go shopping for water, bread, and anything fresh but the grocery store was empty. We have a 5-gallon dispenser of water, and it was enough for the six days, so we still could manage the water situation.

There were lessons to be learned from this weather emergency. I learned that in order to be prepared for emergencies, it is important to always have water stored and to make sure you have a measuring cup to monitor your personal water intake. Also, have non-perishable renal friendly foods and make sure you take your medication as prescribed.

My spouse and I are extremely grateful that we survived as some of my fellow dialysis patients were not so lucky. We are extremely grateful for our Las Palmas DaVita team and for DPC providing webinars, which are recorded and can be watched at any time (www.dpcedcenter.org).

