

PATIENT INFORMATION

Catheter Care - A Patient's Guide

What is a Catheter?

- A catheter is a hollow tube, inserted and retained within the bladder. It is inserted either via your urethra (water pipe) or through your abdominal wall (Supra-pubic).
- It is an aid to help you pass urine.
- In normal use, your catheter is securely retained in your bladder by a balloon and will not come out. It is important not to try to remove your catheter without professional advice as this may cause pain and physical damage.
- Your catheter will need changing regularly. The length of time between changes will be according to your individual circumstances and your Nurse/Doctor will advise you as to the best period of time for you, however, maximum length of time between changes is twelve weeks.
- On your discharge from hospital your district nursing team and GP will be notified for your ongoing care and support with a catheter in the community and are your first point of contact should you have any difficulties.

Care of your catheter

- It is important to keep your catheter and site of entry clean. Ordinary soap and water is all that is needed. Avoid using antiseptic preparations or talcum powder and never use oil or petroleum based products near your catheter as these may damage it.
- A shower or bath may be taken. Your drainage bag should be left in place and changed as required following bathing.
- A good fluid intake will result in dilute urine and help ease constipation, which may cause problems with indwelling catheters. Fruit juices, rich in Vitamin C and cranberry juice may be of benefit as these are believed to reduce debris adhering to the catheter.
- Avoid constipation and straining when opening bowels. A full bowel can press on the catheter and stop it draining.

Looking after your drainage bags

For most people the 'link drainage' system is recommended. There are many different designs of drainage systems and fixation products, straps, holsters and garments which your health care professional and you will decide according to your individual needs. The use of catheter valves may also be appropriate for certain individuals and again can be discussed with your health care professional.

The link system consists of a body-worn bag, emptied as required by means of a drainable tap. It holds approximately 500ml (1 pint). This bag is changed once or twice a week.

At night, a larger 2 litre drainage bag is connected to the outlet of the body-worn bag to facilitate overnight drainage.

The night bag should be secured on a stand or hanger to prevent pulling on the body-worn bag as it fills and should not be allowed to lie on the floor.

It is important to wash and dry your hands before and after emptying, connecting or disconnecting your drainage bags.

A useful tip is to leave a little urine in the body-worn bag prior to connecting to the night bag. This will gently initiate drainage into the night bag to prevent an airlock forming thus promoting better drainage.

All drainage bags should be kept below the level of the bladder to promote drainage.

When disconnecting your night bag, if using one with a tap, simply discard the urine appropriately and flush the bag through with warm water.

Answers to possible problems

- It is common to still get the desire to pass water and to have bladder spasms or cramps when a catheter is first placed. This usually wears off.
- Urine leaking around the catheter is usually as a result of spasm or straining to have your bowels open. This is not an emergency as long as the catheter continues to drain. If the problem continues let your district nurse know.
- You may occasionally see blood, particularly if the catheter gets accidentally pulled or you strain to open your bowels. In these circumstances it should clear by drinking extra fluids. If bleeding persists, contact your district nurse or GP.

If no urine is draining, these are some things you can do yourself

- Ensure there are no kinks in the catheter tubing to restrict urine drainage.
- Ensure the drainage bag is below the level of the bladder.
- Check the drainage bag is inserted correctly.
- Make sure you are drinking enough fluid.
- If you are constipated, you may need to adjust your diet or take a mild laxative.

When to contact your District Nurse or GP

- If you have prolonged bladder pain.
- If urine has not drained for 2-3 hours.
- If there is blood in your urine that does not clear after drinking extra fluids.
- If your urine is cloudy, smelly or feels as if it is burning and does not improve after drinking extra fluids.
- If your catheter continues to leak urine around the catheter.

Advice about sex

Intercourse is usually possible for both men and women with a urethral catheter. For women the catheter should be taped out of the way. Men can tape the catheter along the penis and cover with a condom, or if able, taught how to remove and replace the catheter. The drainage bag should be emptied before sexual activity.