

Patient Information Leaflet

Urinary Catheter

What is a Catheter?

A urinary catheter is a hollow, flexible tube which drains urine from your bladder. It is inserted via the penis in a male, and through an opening next to the vagina in a female.

To prevent the catheter falling out, a small balloon of water at the catheter tip is inflated inside the bladder.

As urine fills the bladder, it drains down the catheter and is collected in a drainage bag attached to your leg or waist.

If you are discharged from hospital with a catheter, the Community nurse will be informed.

Your nurse, or doctor will change the catheter as necessary. It is unusual for a catheter to be left in for more than 3 months without it being changed.

Everyday life doesn't stop because of the catheter, tube and bag. Normally, there is no reason why you should not participate in activities you were not previously involved in. The catheter should not greatly restrict your independence.

Drainage bags

Your catheter will usually be attached to a bag that is then attached to your leg, either by straps or an elasticated sleeve. Some bags can be attached at the waist. Either way, the bag should be well supported so that it does not pull on the catheter.

The bag is worn under your normal clothing and should only be disconnected from the catheter when you change it every 5 to 7 days.

The catheter and bag together make a 'closed system'. If bacteria get into this system, there is a chance of getting a bladder infection.

At night time the tap of your leg bag can be connected to an overnight bag as this holds more urine and will prevent you from having to get up in the night to empty the bag.

Avoid contact of the bag with the floor. Bags should always be positioned below the level of the bladder to reduce the likelihood of backflow.

Some patients may be suited to the use of a catheter valve. Ask your nurse for further information.

Emptying the bag

As the bag fills up, it gradually gets heavier and you will feel a strain on the straps or sleeve. It should be emptied when about two thirds full.

To empty the bag, first wash your hands. Then open the tap at the bottom of the bag to allow the urine to be drained, either into a flushed toilet, or a clean and dry container kept specifically for the job. Take care not to touch the toilet or container with the tap.

Close the tap again when you have finished and wash your hands again.

Night bags with taps are emptied in the same way, though most come without taps and are emptied by tearing or cutting one of the top corners.

Changing the bag

Your community nurse will help and guide you through this procedure initially.

You should change the leg bag once a week. If the night bag has a tap, this can be used for 5-7 nights. Each morning after disconnection from the leg bag, it should be washed through with water, and the cap replaced, to protect the nozzle from bacteria.

If you have overnight bags without taps, then a fresh one should be connected to the tap of your leg bag each night.

To change the bag:

- wash and dry your hands
- unwrap the new bag and loosen the cap
- disconnect the bag from the catheter with some absorbent tissue under the join
- keep the catheter pinched to prevent leakage
- pick up the new bag, shake off the cap and connect firmly to the new catheter
- now wash and dry your hands

Storage and disposal

It is important to store spare drainage bags in their original packaging in a dry, safe place away from direct heat and sunlight.

Before throwing away your drainage bag, empty it and seal in a plastic bag and place in the dustbin.

Do not burn the bags on an open fire or flush down the toilet.

Supplies

Your community nurse will help you to find a catheter and bag system that suit your individual needs.

Most of the equipment you require is available on prescription from your GP.

Personal hygiene

It is easy to acquire an infection when you have a catheter so remember:

- Wash the skin gently in the area where the catheter enters your body at least once a day. Normal soap and water is adequate.
- Ensure the area is dry and do not use talcum powder, creams or antiseptics, unless prescribed by your doctor or nurse.
- Men should wash under their foreskin. Women should ensure they wash from front to the back passage to keep bacteria away from the catheter.
- Wash you hands before and after emptying or changing the drainage bags and after every bowel motion.
- Try to have a bath or shower every day (Keep your leg bag attached to the catheter, it can be patted dry with a towel afterwards, although dry straps will be required).

Diet and fluids

To help the catheter to drain well, you should try to drink at least 8 cups of fluid a day. Water and fruit juices are very good and two glasses of cranberry juice a day may prevent infections.

Your normal diet is fine as long as you can avoid constipation as a full bowel can press on the catheter and prevent the urine flowing properly.

Sex

You are able to have sex with a catheter is in place but may find it uncomfortable, embarrassing and/or inconvenient.

The man can tape the catheter along the penis and apply a condom and the woman can tape it out of the way along her abdomen.

Both should wash well before and after intercourse and plenty of lubricating jelly should be used.

Alternatively, It may be possible to remove the catheter and replace it afterwards, and your nurse will discuss this with you.

Possible problems

The following problems can be addressed by your Community nurse.

When a catheter has just been fitted, the feeling of needing to pass urine is usually due to a mild bladder irritation. The occurrence of bladder spasm or cramp may occur from time to time but should settle in a day or two.

If urine leaks around the outside of the catheter as a result of the spasm, this may be caused by the following:-

- Your bag may be full
- Your bag may be pulling on the catheter
- You may be getting constipated

If none of these are present and the problem persists, please consult your nurse or doctor

If urine is not draining, there are some things you can do yourself:

- ensure there are no kinks in the tubing
- check the bag is below the bladder level
- check the drainage bag is connected the right way up

When to call for help

Contact your Community nurse via the GP surgery in the day or ring the emergency phone number at night if:

- you have prolonged pain or cramps
- if urine is still not draining after 2-3hours
- if there is blood in your urine and it does not clear after drinking extra fluids
- if urine keeps leaking around the catheter
- If blood is leaking around the catheter
- If you have an unusual offensive discharge from around the catheter

For 'Out of hours' problems, the NHS Direct number is 0845 4647

We Value your views on our service

If you wish to comment on the care which you, your relative or friend has received, we will be pleased to hear from you. Please speak to the person in charge of the ward, clinic or service in the first instance or ask them to contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service. If you wish to contact them directly, telephone on 524081 extn 4850.

Alternatively you may prefer to write to:

Graham Elderfield, Chief Executive
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