

Patient information factsheet

Caring for your urethral urinary catheter

This factsheet explains how to care for your urethral urinary catheter, and aims to supplement the advice you will be given by your specialist nurse. If you would like more information or have any concerns, please speak to a member of your healthcare team who will be pleased to advise you further.

What is a urethral urinary catheter?

A urethral urinary catheter is a flexible plastic tube used to drain urine from your bladder when you cannot urinate naturally (or without intervention), or you cannot control when you urinate.

It may be needed because of certain medical conditions including:

- an enlarged prostate
- the inability (temporary or permanent) to control the release of urine
- after surgery on the pelvis or urinary tract

Urinary catheters are also used when the lower part of the body is paralysed.

How does it work?

The small, flexible tube is inserted through the urethra (the opening that carries urine from the bladder to the outside of the body), allowing urine to drain from the bladder into a bag that is usually attached to the thigh. When the catheter is in the bladder, a small balloon is inflated to keep it in place. You may hear it described as an 'indwelling' catheter because it remains in place constantly, for as long as it is needed.

Indwelling urinary catheters can be used in both men and women.

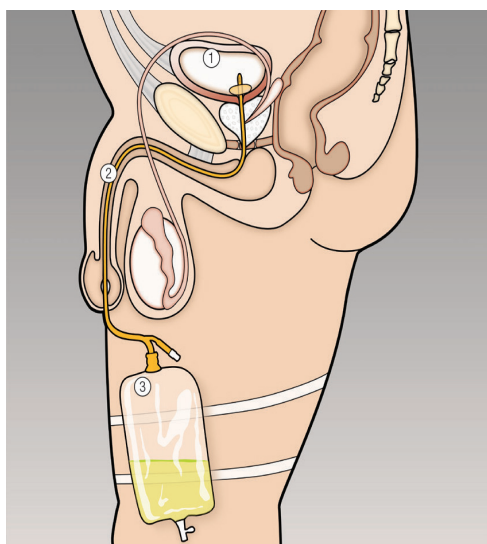


Figure 1. Male catheter in-situ

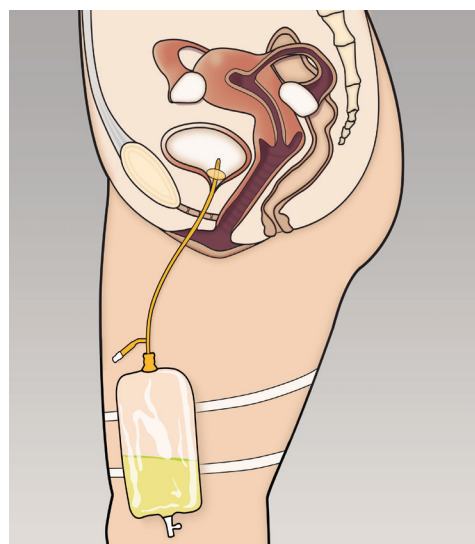


Figure 2. Female catheter in-situ

Caring for your urethral urinary catheter

Do

- always wash your hands before and after handling your catheter.
- check that urine is flowing out of your catheter into the urine collection bag.
- make sure that your catheter tubing does not get twisted or kinked.
- keep the urine collection bag below the level of your bladder.
- make sure that the urine collection bag does not drag and pull on your catheter.
- check for inflammation or signs of infection in the area around your catheter daily. Signs of infection include pus, or irritated, swollen, red or tender skin.
- clean the area around your catheter twice a day using soap and water. Dry with a clean towel afterward. You can shower with your catheter and urine collection bag in place, unless you have been told not to.
- make sure that at night, the urine collection bag remains lower than your bladder to ensure drainage. You may wish to hang the urine collection bag on the side of your bed.

Don't

- apply powder or lotion to the skin around your catheter.
- tug or pull on your catheter.

Emptying the urine collection bag

You will need to empty the urine collection bag regularly, whenever it is half full and at bedtime (when a night bag should be attached).

To do this, you will need to follow the steps below:

1. Wash your hands with soap and water. If you are emptying another person's collection bag, you may wish to wear disposable gloves.
2. Remove the drain spout from its sleeve at the bottom of the collection bag.
3. Open the valve on the spout. Let the urine flow out of the bag and into the toilet or a container. Do not let the tubing or drain spout touch anything.
4. After you empty the bag, wipe off any liquid on the end of the drain spout. Close the valve and put the drain spout back into its sleeve at the bottom of the collection bag.
5. Wash your hands with soap and water.

What is a flip-flow urinary catheter valve?

We may offer you the option of a flip-flow urinary catheter valve instead of a drainage bag. However, this option is not suitable for everyone, and will depend on why your catheter is needed. We will decide which option is best for you based on your needs.

How does it work?

A urinary catheter valve is like having a tap fitted to a catheter instead of a drainage bag. Catheter valves can be used on urethral or supra-pubic catheters (when the catheter is inserted through a small incision made in your abdomen) and is operated either by an up or down lever or a sliding tap to open and close it.

To prevent the catheter from moving around and causing discomfort or damage to the urethra, the flip-flow valve is held in position on your thigh by a leg strap or held in place by close-fitting underwear.

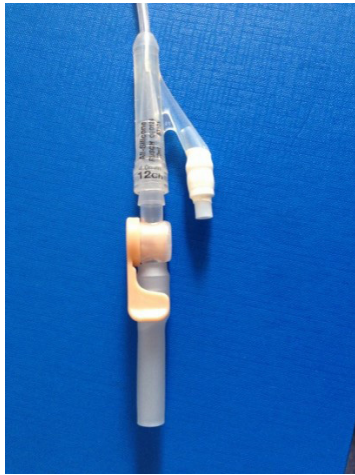


Figure 3. Flip-flow urinary catheter valve open



Figure 4. Flip-flow urinary catheter valve closed

This system helps maintain bladder capacity by allowing your bladder to fill and empty in a more natural fashion. You will only have a catheter bag attached overnight, as during the day the valve will be attached to the catheter. You will need to open the valve to allow your bladder to empty. This will either be when you feel the need to pass urine or at agreed intervals, usually no more than every four hours. We will advise you on this when we attach the valve.

Benefits of a flip-flow urinary catheter valve

The use of a catheter valve provides very discreet catheter management, meaning you may feel more comfortable when wearing close fitting clothes, during activities such as swimming or when sexually active. Using a valve also allows the bladder to fill and therefore helps retain bladder capacity. This is important if it is planned for you to have the catheter removed at a future date.

Caring for your flip-flow urinary catheter valve

Overnight

At night, you will usually need to attach a night drainage bag to the bottom of the valve before opening it, allowing urine to drain into the night bag. In the morning, close the valve and remove the night drainage bag, rinse and store it with the cap on for the next night. There are many brands of valves, catheters and drainage bags, all of which are designed to fit each other. We will give you more information about where to obtain supplies.

Changing the valve

The valve and the leg bag will need to be changed once a week. Always open the flip-flow valve to drain urine first before changing it.

To change the valve, follow the steps below:

1. Always wash your hands before and after opening and closing the flip-flow valve.
2. Open the packet of the new flip-flow valve.
3. Holding the catheter with one hand and the flip-flow valve with the other, remove the old flip-flow valve from the catheter.
4. Without touching the tip of the flip-flow valve, insert the end of the new valve into the catheter.
5. Apply the leg strap to secure the flip-flow valve to your thigh, or place inside snug underwear.
6. Wrap the old flip-flow valve in newspaper or place it in a bag and put it in the dustbin.
7. Wash your hands.

Are there any catheter-related problems I might experience?

Many people have catheters without any difficulties at all. However, some people may experience one or more of the following:

Urinary tract infection (UTI)

A UTI is an infection in your urine, which can be caused by having a foreign body (for example a catheter) in your body. You may feel a burning or stinging sensation when you pass urine, and you may experience the urge to pass urine more often than normal. Your urine may also smell offensive, or look cloudy or mucky. This can usually be treated by your GP with a short course of antibiotics.

Blocked catheter

Catheters block for many reasons. The best way to prevent this is to make sure you drink plenty of fluids to keep it 'flushed through'. You should aim for two to three litres of fluid per day.

Bypassing

This is when urine leaks out around the side of the catheter. It may be due to a blockage in the catheter. If you feel your bladder is full, or you notice minimal drainage in a four-hour period, you should contact your nurse for advice.

Bleeding

Depending on the reason you have a catheter, this can be normal. If you have never had bleeding before, contact your nurse.

Pain

Unfortunately catheters can be uncomfortable. A well-positioned, secured catheter can help with this. There are also medications that can sometimes help. This should be discussed with your urology nurse (if you have one) or your GP.

Painful erections

Some men may experience painful erections. This can be eased by lubricant inside the penis. Detach the catheter bag and insert a bung or spigot. These are available from your GP. You should fold the catheter back down the penis, leaving approximately 2cm additional length before the bend. Then roll the condom down the entire length to hold the catheter securely.

When to call a doctor

Be sure to follow any instructions you have been given about when to contact your urologist (specialist doctor). If you have recently had surgery, you may have been given a specific contact number or details for how to get in touch with the ward you have been discharged from.

Otherwise please call your GP surgery or community nurse (out of hours 111) if:

- No urine or very little urine is flowing into the collection bag for four or more hours.
- No urine or very little urine is flowing into the collection bag and you feel like your bladder is full.
- You have new pain in your abdomen, pelvis, legs or back.
- Your urine is very cloudy, looks bloody, or has large blood clots in it.
- The insertion site becomes very irritated, swollen, red, or tender, or you have pus draining from the catheter insertion site.

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- Your urine has a foul odour. (Please be aware urine in catheter bags often smells offensive and this is normal. You should seek advice only if you notice this to be significantly worse than usual).
- You have a fever of 38 °C or higher, or you have back or flank pain.
- You develop nausea, vomiting, or shaking chills.
- Your catheter falls out.

Catheters in relation to lifestyle

Eating and drinking

Restricting the amount of caffeine you consume has been thought to reduce bladder spasm, bypassing and bladder over activity, but there is currently limited research. How much fluid you need to drink will vary from person to person, but if you are generally fit and healthy, we recommend two to three litres per day. This can be any fluid, but should include some water. If you have a specific health condition that requires you to restrict your fluid intake, such as heart failure, you should be given guidance on this from your GP or when you leave hospital.

Away from home or on holiday

When travelling, staying away from home, or going to work, you will need to carry adequate spare catheter equipment. All catheter supplies should be packed in hand luggage when travelling by air and you should also carry a GP letter confirming your requirement.

Public toilets are few and far between in some countries. It can be easier to find a toilet in a hotel, bar, restaurant or in a shopping centre. You should carry a supply of disposal bags and wipes when you're out, as bins and hygiene can also be a bit hit and miss.

Don't forget your 'Just Can't Wait' toilet card (available online from the Bladder and Bowel Foundation), which states the holder has a genuine medical condition that may require the urgent use of a toilet.

A RADAR key which gives access in the UK to 9,000 locked toilets for disabled people may also prove useful. You can purchase this online.

Activity

Sustained exercise or walking may trigger bleeding and soreness. The bleeding should settle within an hour of you completing the exercise. Swimming may cause irritation, but as long as you are comfortable you may continue. We do not advise riding a bicycle, as it increases your risk of urethral stricture formation (a narrowing of part, or all of, the urethra (the tube that carries urine outside the body from the bladder)), which can affect your ability to pass urine.

Sexual activity

You can have sexual intercourse while wearing a catheter, but you should ask us, or your doctor or nurse for specific information on how to do this safely and comfortably.

Smoking

Smoking is the single biggest cause of bladder cancer and contributes to many bladder-related problems. Your GP can help or you can contact the NHS smoking helpline for guidance on how to quit.

Equipment

Equipment can vary significantly from person to person depending on the reason for your catheter and your personal preference. Your equipment should also be reviewed regularly by your community nursing team involved with your on-going care.

You may find it helpful to ask your healthcare team the following questions:

- Is my catheter intended for short-term or long-term use?
- Is my catheter intermittent or indwelling?
- What type of drainage bag is best for me? For example, long tube, short tube, belly bag, supportive products, or retainer straps.
- Should I use a bag or a flip-flow valve?
- What are the advantages or disadvantages of these?

How to obtain equipment

If you leave hospital with a catheter, you will need to take some equipment home with you. We will give you one weeks' supply of equipment when you leave hospital. After that, your GP will provide a prescription for the equipment you need. Some people use a home delivery system for their prescription, while others collect their prescription from their GP and take it to a local pharmacy. If you would like to know more about the home delivery option, please ask about 'Charter healthcare' or 'Select' services.

When to change equipment

Your bag or valve should be changed every five to seven days, and the catheter every 12 weeks (although some people will need to do this more frequently – you will be told if this is the case). A district nurse can assist with the weekly bag change if required, but generally nursing care is not provided for this. However, a nurse will change the catheter for you.

Storage of equipment

You should store all your equipment in a cool, dry place away from direct sunlight and radiators to maintain the quality of the product. You should also store the equipment flat (not standing up) and in its original box to stop products becoming deformed or pierced.

Disposal of equipment

You should dispose of your equipment in your household rubbish.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us.

Urology centre

Telephone: **023 8120 8455** (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm)

Outside of these hours please contact 111.

Useful links

www.nhs.uk/conditions/urinary-catheters

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For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit **www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport**

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