

# How to care for your urethral catheter

Department of Urology

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This leaflet will help you to look after your catheter. We explain some of the problems that can occur and how you can manage them. It is an important history of your catheter care for you and your nurse.

## What is a urethral catheter?

A catheter is a narrow flexible, soft tube, which is inserted into the bladder through your natural 'waterworks' passage – the urethra.

The catheter is held in place by a small balloon in the bladder, inflated with water.

Ask your nurse to show you how a catheter works. The catheter is attached to a urine drainage bag, or to a valve (tap).

## How should I care for my catheter?

- Always wash your hands before and after touching the catheter and when changing the bag or valve, this is to reduce the risk of infection.
- Have a twice daily bath or shower (you can do this with your leg bag attached) or you can wash the area where the catheter enters your body with a mild soap and water.
- Do not use talcum powder or creams around the catheter.
- Drink at least 2-3 pints, 1.5-2 litres, to reduce the risk of infection.
- Remember to drink more fluids in hot weather, as you will pass less urine. The colour of urine varies enormously; generally it should be a pale yellow colour.

- Try to empty the drainage bag when about half full, so that it doesn't become full and heavy.
- Discuss with your nurse how often your catheter valve (tap) needs opening (if you are using a valve).
- Try not to get constipated, the bowels are close to the bladder and hard stools can press against the bladder, causing the catheter to block.
- Eat a well balanced diet containing 5 portions of fruit and vegetables daily. Eat plenty of food containing fibre, such as brown bread and wholemeal cereals; this will promote general good health and help to prevent constipation.

## Living with your catheter

Having a catheter should not limit your social and leisure activities. It can improve the quality of your life.

### Sexual activity

Please discuss this with your nurse or continence advisor.

## Care of your catheter equipment

You should always have a spare catheter at home.

### Catheter drainage bags

There are 2 main types of catheter bags  
– a leg bag and a night bag.

A leg bag is discreet; it can be provided with a long or short tube. A leg bag is attached to your leg with either straps or a special holder. A leg bag is kept on all the time and should be changed every 4-7 days.

At night a larger bag is attached to the leg bag, so that it does not need to be emptied so frequently. In the morning remove the night bag, empty it and leave it to drain. These bags also need changing every 4-7 days.

If you live in a care home discuss changing your night bag with the staff.

Dispose of bags by rinsing and then wrapping in newspaper and a plastic bag before placing in the dustbin.

There is a wide range of bags, valves, catheter support straps, accessories and stands: ask your nurse to discuss these with you.

You can obtain all the equipment you need for your catheter on prescription.

## Looking after your catheter valve

A catheter valve is a tap-like connection that fits into the end of your catheter. The valve is an alternative to using a drainage bag. You can empty your bladder by releasing the valve. Discuss with your nurse how often you need to release the valve.

A catheter valve should be changed every 5-7 days. With certain valves it is possible to connect the valve to a drainage bag; you can regularly drain your bladder into a bag.

Use of a catheter valve gives you more control for draining urine from your bladder.

Always wash your hands when handling your catheter and valve.

## Useful information

Please complete this with the help of either the hospital or community nurse.

Doctor (GP) \_\_\_\_\_ Tel No \_\_\_\_\_

Community Nurse \_\_\_\_\_ Tel No \_\_\_\_\_

Hospital \_\_\_\_\_ Tel No \_\_\_\_\_

Your catheter is:

Type \_\_\_\_\_

Size \_\_\_\_\_

Day Bag            Name \_\_\_\_\_            Size \_\_\_\_\_

Night Bag        Name \_\_\_\_\_            Size \_\_\_\_\_

Catheter Valve   Name \_\_\_\_\_

Accessories      \_\_\_\_\_

## Catheter history

Please complete with the help of your nurse

Patient Name \_\_\_\_\_

	Type and size of catheter	Date next catheter change due
Date		
Date		
Date		
Date		
Date		
Date		
Date		
Date		
Date		
Date		
Date		
Date		
Date		
Date		
Date		
Date		
Date		

## Solving problems with your catheter

Problem	Possible Cause	What You Can do
My catheter is leaking near my body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catheter is blocked</li> <li>• Bladder spasm or cramp</li> <li>• Catheter is kinked</li> <li>• Catheter bag is too full</li> <li>• Catheter is too big</li> </ul>	<p>Contact your GP or Community Nurse</p> <p>Contact your GP: there may be medication you can have to help</p> <p>Straighten out the tubing</p> <p>Empty the bag regularly</p> <p>Contact your GP or Community Nurse</p>
My catheter is leaking where it is connected to the bag	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Loose connection</li> <li>• Catheter is split</li> </ul>	<p>Check all connections are secure, from catheter to bag or catheter valve. If needed disconnect and reinsert</p> <p>Contact your GP or Community Nurse</p>
No urine draining into bag	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kinks in catheter tube or drainage bag tubing</li> <li>• You are not drinking enough</li> <li>• Constipation: causing a blockage</li> <li>• Drainage bag higher than your bladder</li> <li>• Catheter is blocked</li> <li>• No urine being produced</li> </ul>	<p>Straighten out any kinks in tubing</p> <p>Drink more fluids</p> <p>Eat more fruit and vegetables. If concerned contact your Community Nurse</p> <p>Make sure your drainage bag is below the level of your hip</p> <p>Contact your GP or Community Nurse</p> <p>Contact your GP or Community Nurse</p>



<p>Cloudy or smelly urine with or without pain</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A urine infection</li> <li>• You are not drinking enough</li> <li>• Some foods cause smelly urine</li> </ul>	<p>Contact your GP or Community Nurse who will advise you Drink more fluids</p>
<p>'Discharge' around catheter</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An infection</li> <li>• An allergy to the catheter</li> </ul>	<p>Contact your GP or Community Nurse Contact your GP or Community Nurse</p>
<p>My catheter has fallen out</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catheter balloon has deflated</li> <li>• Catheter has accidentally been pulled on and come out</li> <li>• Bladder spasm</li> </ul>	<p><b>Does your catheter need replacing immediately? Can you pass urine without it? Replace with a new catheter if you have been shown how to do so Contact your GP or Community Nurse</b> Contact your GP: there may be medication you can have to help</p>
<p>My catheter is causing pain</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your catheter may not be the right size</li> <li>• Your catheter may be caught on something</li> </ul>	<p>Contact your GP or Community Nurse who will advise Check your catheter is not caught up i.e. on a chair, bed or wheelchair</p>
<p>Blood in urine</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inserting a new catheter can cause slight bleeding</li> <li>• A urine infection</li> </ul>	<p>Drink extra fluids, observe, if becoming worse contact GP or Community Nurse Contact your GP or Community Nurse</p>

## Other sources of information and help

### **Incontact**

– Provides information and support for people affected by bladder and bowel problems.

United House, North Road, London N7 9DP

**Telephone** [0870 7703246](tel:08707703246)

**Email** [info@incontact.org.uk](mailto:info@incontact.org.uk)

**Website** [www.incontact.org.uk](http://www.incontact.org.uk)

### **The Continence Foundation**

– provides leaflets and information

307 Hatton Square, 16 Baldwins Gardens, London EC1N 7R

**Telephone** [0207 404 6875](tel:02074046875)

**Fax** [0207 404 6876](tel:02074046876)

**Email** [continencefoundation@dial.pipex.com](mailto:continencefoundation@dial.pipex.com)

**Website** [www.continence-foundation.org.uk](http://www.continence-foundation.org.uk)

### **Continence Advisory Service**

West Sussex Primary Care Trust

**Telephone** [01444 475 807](tel:01444475807)

**Fax** [01444 475 782](tel:01444475782)

**PCT Website** [www.westsussexpct.nhs.uk](http://www.westsussexpct.nhs.uk)

### **Brighton and Hove Continence Advisory Service**

**Telephone** [01273 265912](tel:01273265912)

**Fax** [01273 242245](tel:01273242245)

### **Brighton and Hove PCT**

**Website** [www.brightonandhovepct.nhs.uk](http://www.brightonandhovepct.nhs.uk)



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**Disclaimer**

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is in no way intended to replace professional clinical advice by a qualified practitioner.

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