Patient Information:

This leaflet provides advice and support to patients and carers about Indwelling Urinary Catheters and key contact details.

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Index

What is a catheter? 1
Why are catheters used? 1
Caring for your indwelling catheter 1
Drainage bags 4
Disposing of drainage bags 4
Catheter valves 5
Care of catheter valve 5
Disposing of catheter valves 5
Frequently asked questions 5 – 6

For any queries or concerns you have regarding your catheter please discuss with your healthcare professional who can give you further detailed information and individualised care and advice.

CONTACT NUMBERS

Ward / department  Tel:
Community nurse  Tel:
GP  Tel

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What is a Catheter?

A catheter is a thin, hollow, flexible tube designed to drain urine from the bladder. The catheter is kept in place by a small balloon at its tip filled with sterile water, which prevents it from falling out.

It is inserted into the bladder through the urethra (water pipe). This is a small opening above the vagina in women and runs through the length of the penis in men.

In some people it may be necessary to insert the catheter into the bladder through an incision (cut) through the abdominal wall. This is called a supra pubic catheter.

Why are catheters used?

Some people find it difficult to empty their bladder so a catheter is inserted to drain urine away. Catheters are also used before or after surgery, for instilling medication into the bladder and occasionally for managing urinary leakage if this cannot be managed in another way.

Caring for your Indwelling Catheter

1. **Maintain hygiene**

   Good personal hygiene is important when you have a catheter in place to prevent a urine infection.

   - Wash your hands before and after handling the catheter or drainage bag.
   - Wash your catheter and the area around it after every bowel motion or at least daily with soap and water using a clean cloth, dry thoroughly.
   - Avoid using talc or creams on the area around the catheter.
   - Before you shower or bathe, empty the drainage bag, but leave it connected.
   - For supra pubic catheters, initially you may need to wear a dressing around the incision site, however once healed this is not necessary.
2. **Have a good fluid intake.**

   Unless told otherwise by your nurse or doctor, drink 2 litres (3 pints) of fluid a day to help in the prevention of infection and help avoid constipation.

   Drinking two glasses of cranberry juice daily can be beneficial and may help in the prevention of infection in some people. However cranberry juice is not a treatment for infection. Cranberry juice should not be taken if you are also taking Warfarin (a medication prescribed to reduce problems with blood clots).

3. **Diet and bowel care**

   A healthy balanced diet rich in fresh fruit, vegetables and fibre is recommended as this will help to maintain a regular bowel pattern. Constipation can prevent your catheter draining freely as a full bowel presses on the catheter. This is a common cause of urinary leakage around the catheter.

4. **Activity and exercise**

   Having a catheter in place should not restrict your daily activities. Gentle exercise will help your catheter to drain.

**Drainage Bags**

Leg bags should be worn in a comfortable position against the thigh, knee or calf area (according to individual preference) and secured to your leg by straps or a sleeve/holder. The Belly Bag is worn as a bum bag and is secured by a soft belt around the waist.

In order to minimize the risk of infection it is essential to wash your hands before and after emptying, or changing the bag. When emptying the bag try to make sure that the outlet does not come into contact with the toilet or other receptacle and the outlet tap is dried with clean tissue paper following emptying.

The drainage bag should only be disconnected from the catheter when absolutely necessary to reduce the risk of introducing infection. It should be changed every 5 – 7 days unless discoloured/soiled. When applying a new drainage bag to the catheter it is important, when removing the cap not to touch the sterile connector.

All drainage bags are designed for single use only and must not be re-used. For whatever reason a drainage bag is disconnected from the catheter a fresh bag must always be re applied.

At night it is recommended that you connect a larger capacity bag onto the leg bag. The outlet tap on the leg bag should be in the open position to allow the urine to flow into the night bag. When removing the protective cap from the night bag do not touch the sterile connector which attaches to the outlet tap. A stand for the night bag will be provided and should be used to promote effective drainage.
To disconnect the night bag from the leg bag wash your hands, close the outlet tap on the leg bag and disconnect the tubing from the tap. Dry the outlet tap with clean tissue paper. Empty night bag according to manufacturer’s instructions and dispose of the bag in the dustbin, ensuring it is wrapped in newspaper or a plastic bag. Wash your hands.

Disposing of Drainage Bags

Drainage bags may be disposed of in the dustbin, provided they have been emptied and wrapped in newspaper or a plastic bag.

Catheter Valves

Catheter valves are used as an alternative for some people to a leg bag. They are not suitable for everyone so you should ask your nurse for advice on whether a valve would be suitable for you.

A catheter valve is a tap that is connected directly to the catheter outlet. It allows drainage of urine from the bladder to be controlled, and helps maintain bladder muscle tone and a good capacity.

It is very important that the valve is opened at regular intervals throughout the day, every 3 – 4 hours to allow the bladder to empty. If you do not empty the bladder regularly you may experience some abdominal discomfort as the bladder becomes full or you may experience leakage of urine around the catheter.

Care of the Catheter Valve

Change the catheter valve every 5 – 7 days. In order to minimize the risk of infection it is essential to wash your hands before and after emptying, or changing the valve. When emptying the valve try to make sure that the outlet does not come into contact with toilet or other receptacle and the outlet tap is dried with clean tissue paper following emptying.

It is possible to attach an overnight bag to the valve. Once the night bag is connected, the valve should be in the open position to allow urine to drain.

Disposing of Catheter Valves

Catheter valves may be disposed of in the dustbin, provided they have been wrapped in newspaper or a plastic bag.
Frequently Asked Questions:-

- **How often does the catheter need changing?**

  Indwelling catheters need changing at regular intervals between 4 – 12 weeks. The frequency of changes will depend on the material the catheter is made of and whether you experience problems with it blocking. Your nurse will discuss with you when and where your catheter will be changed.

- **How often will I need to change the catheter?**

  You might need an indwelling catheter temporarily, after an operation for example, or you may need to have one for a longer period or even the rest of your life. Please discuss this with your doctor or nurse as you should know why you need a catheter and when its use will be reviewed.

- **Is it possible to have sex with a catheter in place?**

  Yes. Men and women can continue to have a normal love life with a catheter in place. An indwelling catheter can be taped out of the way, across the abdomen in women or along the penis in men. It is also advisable for men to use a condom and water based lubricating gel to reduce the risk of soreness developing. However, it may be helpful to discuss this with your nurse as there may be alternatives available such as the use of a supra pubic catheter or you could be taught to remove and replace the catheter yourself.

- **Catheter falls out**

  Do not try to replace your catheter yourself. Contact your nurse or doctor as soon as possible.

- **What problems may I experience**

  Initial discomfort:-

  Initially people with a catheter can experience bladder spasm or cramp and / or the desire to pass urine. These sensations usually subside within a few days. If they persist it is advisable to discuss with your nurse.

  Infection or blood in the urine:-

  People with an indwelling catheter have an increased risk of developing a urinary tract infection. Urinary tract infections can cause you to experience stinging or burning in your bladder, abdominal or lower back pain, give you a temperature and make you feel generally unwell. It is helpful to be aware of the colour and odour of your urine. Should the urine become cloudy, contain blood or smell offensive, increase your fluid intake and speak to your doctor or nurse.
Blockage of the catheter / leakage around catheter:-

This may occur if your catheter or tubing becomes kinked, there is irritation in the bladder, a build-up of debris in the catheter or if you are constipated, you should:-

- Check your catheter and tubing, release any kinks.
- Check the drainage bag is not too full.
- Follow previous dietary and fluid advice mentioned to avoid constipation.
- Movement can dislodge minor blockage, walking around may help.
- Medication can sometimes help relieve bladder spasm. Although it is not suitable for everyone this would need to be discussed with your doctor or nurse.
- Make sure your leg or night bag is positioned below the level of your bladder / waist to allow urine drainage.
- If no urine drains from your catheter and you become uncomfortable you should contact the district nurse or out of hours service. If urine is draining from your catheter but leaks around it do not worry this is not a medical emergency, follow the previous advice mentioned in this document and discuss with your district nurse.

PLEASE DO NOT ATTEMPT TO REMOVE YOUR CATHETER UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES WITHOUT PROFESSIONAL ADVICE