About your catheter

Important information to help you care for your urinary catheter.

This booklet is designed to help you care for your catheter while in hospital and at home. You should show this booklet to your District nurse when you have been discharged from hospital.

District nurse contact numbers:-

9am – 4.30pm: - ________________

District nurse
Out of hours contact number: - ________________

NHS direct 0845 44647
Important information you should know about your catheter.
(This will be filled in by the nursing staff)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The reason I have a urinary catheter is:-</th>
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<tr>
<td>Date catheter was inserted</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is catheter short or long term?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type <em>(ie foleys, silastic)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Leg bag make and tubing length</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overnight bag</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date to be changed (long-term catheters)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Removal date (short term catheters)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Were there any problems when catheterising?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bladder washouts necessary? Yes or no</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does the patient experience bladder spasm? Yes or no</td>
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A catheter is a hollow flexible tube which drains urine from your bladder. The catheter enters the bladder by inserting it into your urine tube (urethra) this is known as a urethral catheter. Alternatively it may be inserted via a small incision made in your abdomen, just below the belly button (umbilicus) this is known as a supra-pubic catheter. The same sort of catheter is used for both methods.

Once the catheter is correctly placed inside the bladder, a small balloon is inflated at the tip of the catheter to prevent it from falling out. As urine drains from the kidneys into the bladder it drains down the catheter into a drainage bag. The urine drainage bag can be worn attached to the leg (leg bag) or a larger bag on a stand for night-time (bed bag)
You will not need to pass urine in the usual way when you have a catheter in place.

Diagram showing the position of a urinary catheter in a male and female patient

Diagram to show placement of suprapubic catheter
Depending on the material the catheter is made from they can remain in place from 28 days (a short term catheter) or up to 12 weeks (a long term catheter). The nursing staff will inform you which type of catheter you have, and how long it can remain before needing to be changed or removed.

Why do people need a catheter?
Many people need a catheter at some stage of their lives, either for a short or long period of time. Catheterisation describes the technique of inserting a tube into the bladder to drain and collect urine.

Normally we are aware of when we need to empty our bladder, and after passing urine the bladder is completely empty. Sometimes the bladder can’t function normally; your bladder muscle may lose its normal tone and prevent you from emptying your bladder completely. In men the prostate gland may enlarge as a man grows older and this enlargement can cause pressure on the urethra and prevent the bladder from emptying. Sometimes it may be necessary to keep your bladder empty either during or after an operation. A catheter can be inserted into the bladder to drain it and prevent any complications that could arise.

Personal hygiene
It is important that you minimise the risk of developing an infection in your urinary system through good personal hygiene. The air around us is full of micro-organisms like bacteria, which may settle on your catheter or drainage bag. This then enables these organisms to enter the bladder and lead to the development of a urinary tract infection (UTI). Bacteria within your bladder could also cause the catheter to block and prevent the urine from draining freely.

- Always wash and dry your hands thoroughly before and after emptying or changing a drainage bag
- Wash the area where the catheter enters your body with mild soap and water, and continue washing down the catheter tube. Make sure you rinse the area well and dry it completely. This should be done at least daily
- If you are having a bath or shower, empty the bag, remove the supportive straps or sleeves, and bathe as normal. After bathing dry the bag well and re-apply the supporting straps or sleeve
- Men should ensure that the foreskin on the penis is pulled back and the area under the foreskin is cleaned with mild soap and water, rinsed well and dried. The foreskin MUST then be replaced back over the penis
- You should not use creams, or ointments (unless prescribed) or talcum powder around the area as chemicals in these could damage the catheter

Your urinary drainage bag
Your catheter is attached to a urinary drainage bag. There are two types of drainage bags: those worn on the leg, either on the thigh or lower leg, and overnight drainage bags, or bed bags.

Leg bags are connected to your catheter and act as a container to collect the urine. These bags need to be emptied regularly. You should aim to empty the bag when it is no more than half full, as this will minimise the risk of a heavy urine bag pulling on your catheter. The nursing staff will make sure that you are able to open the tap at the bottom of the leg bag and
to close it once the urine has drained. It is important that the leg bag is well supported, and you have been supplied with elastic straps or supportive elastic sleeves, which holds the leg bag in place. Where you position the leg bag depends on where feels comfortable for you.

Men usually prefer a leg bag with a long length drainage tube. This allows the bag to be worn on the calf, and enables the man to have easy access to the leg bag drainage tap. Women usually prefer a shorter length tube so the bag is worn around the thigh. This means that the catheter and bag are not visible when wearing a skirt and the drainage tap is easily accessible when the bag needs emptied.

You may also have been given a supportive strap which is worn around the thigh and supports the catheter itself. This is used to prevent ‘drag’ on your catheter and helps to promote comfort and minimise complications.

Bed bags or overnight drainage bags are larger than the leg bags. They are connected to the bottom of your leg bag to collect the urine overnight. You should remove the lycra straps supporting the leg bag or remove it from the elastic sleeve and attach the overnight drainage bag to the bottom of your leg bag. You must make sure that once connected you then open the leg bag tap and leave it in an open position while the overnight bag is attached. This allows the urine to drain freely.

Support the bed bag on a stand or support hanger and always keep the bag lower than your bladder. Do not allow the bag to lie on the floor.

In the morning, close the tap on the leg bag and remove the bed bag. Re-apply the supportive straps on your leg bag. Empty and dispose of the bed bag.

The nursing staff will show you how to connect the bag before your discharge from hospital.

**How do I empty the leg bag?**
- Wash and dry your hands thoroughly
- Open the tap at the bottom of the bag and drain it into a toilet or suitable container.
- Close the tap after you have drained the bag.
- Wash and dry your hands.
How often does the drainage bags need changed?
The legs bags must be changed at least every seven days. If you have a urinary infection or some blood or debris in the bag you may need to change it more regularly. The district nurse will let you know if this is necessary.

The overnight bags are single use only. After use drain the urine into the toilet and dispose of the bag.

If you are using a catheter valve, these must be changed every seven days.

How do I dispose of the drainage bags?
Empty your drainage bag and connect a new one. Wrap the bag in newspaper or a plastic bag and dispose of it in the household rubbish.

What should I eat and drink?
It is important that you keep your bladder and bowels healthy. In order to help prevent any complications and keep your catheter draining, you need to drink between three – four pints of fluid every day. This is the approximate equivalent to five or six mugs or eight to 10 cups per day. If you have an underlying health condition which requires fluid restriction, please discuss this with your Doctor/Nurse.

It is beneficial to reduce the amount of caffeine intake, so try to drink fluids that are varied. Drinking cranberry juice (one cup per day) may help to keep the urine clear. Following a healthy diet which includes eating five portions of fruit or vegetables per day will help prevent constipation and help maintain good urinary drainage from your catheter.

What do I do if urine stops draining into my bag?
- Check that the catheter tubing is not kinked or blocked
- Check that the drainage bag is below the level of your bladder
- Make sure you are drinking enough liquid
- Check that the drainage bag is connected correctly and does not need emptying
- Avoid constipation

When should I seek advice?
On occasions it may become necessary to ask for advice or help. You should contact your district nurse or GP if you experience any of the following
- The catheter becomes blocked.
- If no urine has drained after three hours
- If you develop lower abdominal pain and feel that you are unable to pass urine
- If your catheter falls out
- If your urine appears cloudy, has a strong smell, or feels as if it is burning and this does not improve after drinking more fluids
- Your urine is suddenly blood stained or discoloured

If you are unable to contact your district nurse or GP you should contact NHS Direct who will give you advice and direct you to care. While on the ward you should inform a member of the nursing or medical staff.
What happens when I am discharged from hospital?
Before you are discharged from hospital the nursing staff on the ward will show you how to care for your catheter.

They will have contacted your district nurse and made arrangements for them to visit you in your home to make sure you are able to care for your catheter and answer any queries or concerns you may have. They will give you phone numbers where you can reach the district nurses, should you require help or advice before their first visit. The contact numbers are written on the front of this leaflet.

You will also be given seven days supply of catheter drainage bags and equipment necessary to replace your catheter should it be needed.

How do I receive further catheter supplies?
The catheters and drainage bags are supplied on prescription from your GP. The prescription can be obtained either at a pharmacy or be delivered direct to your home via a home delivery service. Your district nurse will advise you on how many supplies you will need to have and can arrange home delivery service if you require it.

How do I store my catheters and drainage equipment?
Catheters, drainage bags and the equipment given to you when discharged from hospital should be kept in their original packaging in a safe dry place away from direct sunlight or heat. A wardrobe or storage cupboard would be ideal.

Can I have sex with a catheter in place?
Many men and women continue to have an enjoyable sex life while a catheter is in place. Women should tape the catheter out of the way along the abdomen.

It may be possible to remove the catheter drainage bag, and temporarily use a catheter bung, (spigot) or catheter valve which will prevent the urine draining. It is important that the catheter is attached to the drainage bag and the urine is allowed to drain freely once intercourse is complete.

Men can tape the catheter along the penis and apply a condom over the penis. They may also be able to remove the drainage bag and use a spigot or catheter valve to prevent urine leakage.

Please don’t be embarrassed to ask for advice from your nurses or medical staff.

Using your catheter on holiday
If you are going on holiday, make sure you take plenty of drainage bags or catheter valves with you. It is very important that you take a spare catheter with you.

You should pack your supplies in your suitcase as well as in your hand luggage should your suitcase be lost. You do not need a doctor or nurses letter when carrying this equipment.
Where should I seek advice or help?

<table>
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<th>Telephone numbers</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Continence Foundation Helpline</td>
<td>0207 831 9831</td>
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<tr>
<td>Continence Information in Confidence</td>
<td>0800 591 783</td>
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The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) can provide help, advice and support to patients, relatives or carers who have any questions or concerns regarding their health care. PALS are unable to give medical advice. You can contact PALS on free phone 0800 953 0667. Monday – Friday 9.00am - 5.00pm. An answer phone is available outside of these hours and calls will be returned the next working day.

Data Protection

Any personal information is kept confidential. There may be occasions where your information needs to be shared with other care professionals to ensure you receive the best care possible.

In order to assist us improve the services available your information may be used for clinical audit, research, teaching and anonymised for National NHS Reviews. Further information is available in the leaflet Disclosure of Confidential Information IL137, via Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust website or the PALS Service.

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Author: Lorraine Montgomery – Urology Nurse Specialist

This leaflet can be made available in other languages and formats upon request