

# Having a urinary catheter – information for women

This leaflet explains what a catheter is, why you need it and how you should look after it. If you have any further questions, please contact your district nurse or GP.

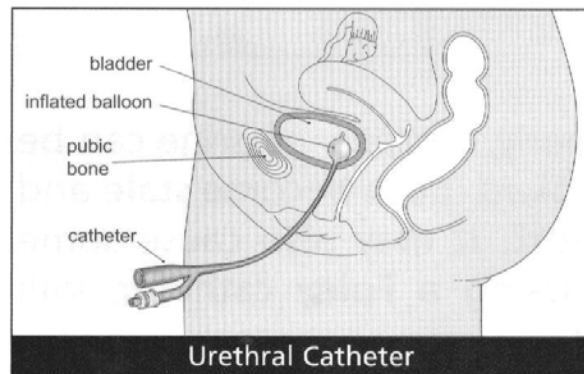
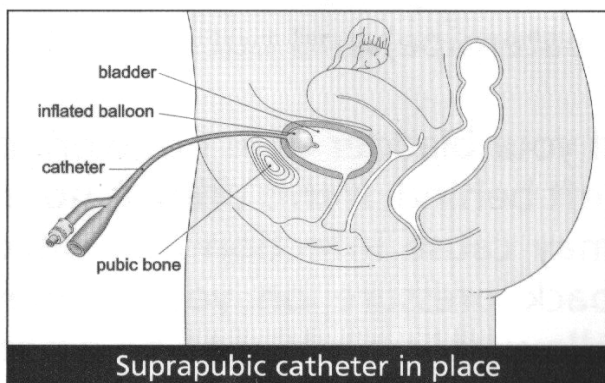
## What is a catheter?

A catheter is a hollow, flexible tube that drains urine from your bladder.

Urinary catheters can be fitted:

- through your urethra (the tube through which urine passes), or
- through a channel in your abdomen wall (a suprapubic catheter) – see the diagrams below.

There are also other ways to fit catheters, but these are not discussed in this leaflet.



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## Why do I need to have a catheter?

There are many reasons why people need a catheter: your bladder may not be able to contract on its own to empty itself or you may need it for other health-related problems.

You may need a catheter for a short period, such as before or after surgery, or you may need it permanently. Your doctor should explain to you in detail why you need to have a catheter and how long you may need it for. He/she will also ask you to give your verbal consent (permission) to have a catheter inserted. Please make sure that you ask any questions you have at this time.

The catheter I have is:	
My catheter will need changing:	

## Having a catheter inserted

The way that your catheter is inserted (urethrally or suprapubically) will depend on the reason and length of time that you need a catheter for. The medical staff will discuss this with you.

Once the catheter is in place, a balloon is inflated inside your bladder, to prevent it from falling out. Your catheter will be attached either to a leg bag or a valve (flip flo valve).

- A **leg bag** is a simple drainage bag that is strapped to your leg and collects your urine. It needs emptying at regular intervals.
- With a **catheter valve**, your urine collects in your bladder, which can be emptied at regular intervals by releasing the valve.

Both options should be explained to you in detail. The bag or valve needs changing every five to seven days. It is important that you do not change them more often because this raises the risk of infection.

When you go to bed at night, you should attach the leg bag or valve to a larger bag which will collect urine overnight. If you are prone to swollen legs or have poor circulation, loosen the velcro straps on the leg bag, so that they do not constrict the blood flow to your leg. In the morning, disconnect the night bag, empty it and store it in a clean place until you reconnect it. This bag should also be changed every five to seven days.

We will give you supplies when you leave the hospital and advise you how to get further supplies.

Occasionally, straps to secure the leg bag to your leg may not be appropriate. If this is the case, your district nurse will discuss alternatives with you.

## Will I have any pain?

The catheter may feel uncomfortable at first. You could experience spasms (sudden contractions of your bladder muscles) which can be painful, make you feel like you need to pass urine and cause some urine to bypass the catheter and leak out. This is your body's way of trying to expel the catheter from your body. If you have spasms:

- try repositioning the catheter so that it is not pulling on your bladder
- try to relax
- do not strain or try to push the catheter out
- drink as advised on page 3.

If this feeling lasts, take the painkillers you have been prescribed and contact your GP or district nurse.

You may find it uncomfortable when the catheter is removed, but it should not be painful.

## Are there any risks associated with having a catheter?

You may have a slightly increased risk of developing urinary stones or a urinary tract infection. Your doctor will discuss any risks with you before asking for your consent to insert the catheter.

## Changing your catheter

Catheters can stay in place from between two to 12 weeks before they need to be changed. District nurses usually change urethral catheters in your own home.

If you have a suprapubic catheter, you may need to come back to hospital the first time it is changed, if you have already left. After this, the district nurse can change it.

We will explain to you the type of catheter you have and when it needs changing in more detail before you go home.

You will be referred to a district nurse when you leave hospital so she/he will be your point of contact when you are at home.

## Are there any alternatives to a catheter?

As mentioned earlier in the leaflet, there are many reasons why a catheter may need to be inserted. The team caring for you will explain if there are any alternatives for you.

Sometimes, if the catheter is for a long-term condition, you may be able to perform self-catheterisation. This involves passing a catheter into your bladder to drain your urine, then removing the catheter and discarding it. Special training is given on how to do this, so ask the medical team if you think you could be a candidate for this.

## Looking after your catheter

### Hygiene

**Before and after touching your catheter, you must make sure that you always wash your hands thoroughly.**

You can bath or shower as normal with a catheter. **If you have a leg bag, do not disconnect it**, as this could introduce an infection. If you are not able to have a bath or shower, wash the area where the catheter enters your body twice a day. Wash the area using downward strokes from where it enters the body – this is to help prevent infection. Don't apply talcum powder or cream to the area as this may also increase the risk of infection.

### Your diet and fluids

It is important to eat a balanced diet of fruit, vegetables and fibre to avoid constipation (difficulty or pain emptying your bowels). If your bowel is full, which happens when you are constipated, it can press on your bladder and reduce urine drainage, which may block the catheter.

Keeping hydrated is very important when you have a catheter. Try to drink at least one and a half to two litres per day (six to eight large glasses of fluid). This will help to prevent infections and flush out any debris in your bladder.

Drinking alcohol will not affect your catheter. However, if you are taking certain medicines or recovering from surgery, your doctor may advise against drinking alcohol. This depends on your individual circumstances so please ask your doctor or nurse if you are uncertain.

It is thought that cranberry juice may help to reduce the risk of infection. Drinking two glasses per day is enough. **However, do not drink cranberry juice if you have arthritis, heartburn, irritable bowel syndrome or hiatus hernia, as it could make your symptoms worse. It can**

**also interfere with the way warfarin works, so please do not drink cranberry juice if you take warfarin tablets.**

### **Work and exercise**

You can return to work, exercise or go on holiday as soon as you feel able to and your doctor has said you are fit enough to do so. Your doctor can advise you on this.

### **Having sex**

If you were sexually active before having a catheter fitted, you should be able to have sex with one in place.

You can leave the catheter in place, or pull it forward and tape it onto your stomach. You can use lubricating jelly if you need to – it will not damage the catheter. Always wash around your catheter after having sex.

## **What should I look out for?**

### **Blood in your urine**

When the catheter is first inserted or changed, your urine may be blood-stained. If this continues after drinking extra fluids to flush the blood out, you should contact your district nurse or GP for advice.

If the catheter is accidentally pulled (out), it may cause bleeding. To prevent this, please make sure that it is secured properly. If this does happen, contact your district nurse or GP.

### **Cloudy, smelly, thick urine**

Your urine should be light yellow in colour (although some medicines may discolour urine) and should flow freely. If your urine becomes cloudy, smelly or thick, check that you are drinking enough and increase your fluid intake accordingly. If you develop a high temperature with these symptoms, please contact your GP or district nurse, as this could indicate that you have a urine infection.

### **Leaking catheters**

Sometimes the catheter can leak around the entry site. If this happens, make sure the tubing is not blocked or kinked (bent). Move the drainage bag below the level of your bladder and make sure you are not constipated.

Don't apply tape to keep the bag attached to the catheter. If you are experiencing leakage, you may need to change the bag you are using to a different type with a different connection. Your district nurse can advise you on this.

**If no urine drains from your bladder for four hours or if you are experiencing pain and have been drinking fluids as normal, please contact your GP.**

**If you have a suprapubic catheter and it falls out, contact your GP or district nurse immediately.**

**If you are concerned about anything, please talk to a healthcare professional.**

## Appointments at King's

We have teamed up with King's College Hospital in a partnership known as King's Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre. We are working together to give our patients the best possible care, so you might find we invite you for appointments at King's. To make sure everyone you meet always has the most up-to-date information about your health, we may share information about you between the hospitals.

### Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your catheter, please contact your district nurse or GP.

Alternatively, you can contact:

- **Florence Ilegbusi**, care of the elderly nurse specialist, on **020 7188 2083**, Monday to Wednesday and Fridays. On Thursdays, please call **020 7188 2093**.
- **Ellie Stewart**, urogynaecology nurse specialist for Women's Services, on **020 7188 3671**, Mondays and Tuesdays only. If you contact her outside of these days, please leave a message on her answer machine and she will contact you on her return.
- **Urology outpatients** on **020 7188 7319**, Monday to Friday 9am – 5 pm.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets)

### Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

**t:** 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:

**e:** 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas'      **t:** 020 7188 8803 at Guy's      **e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)

### Language Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.

**t:** 020 7188 8815      **fax:** 020 7188 5953

### NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

**t:** 111

### NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

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

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