

# Managing a urinary catheter valve

## Information for men and women

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

### What is a catheter valve?

A urinary catheter valve is like a small tap or switch fitted directly to your urinary catheter instead of a drainage bag (leg-bag or two-litre bag).

The catheter valve works in the same way as the drainage valve of a urinary bag:

- Turn the lever down (towards the floor) to open the valve mechanism and let urine out.
- Turn the level up (towards your head) to close the valve mechanism.



Bard catheter valve  
© 2018 C. R. Bard, Inc. Used with permission.

When the valve lever faces upward urine is stored in your bladder also known as your natural bag.

You can use the valve both for urethral and suprapubic catheters. There are many different types of valves available on the market. Although they may vary in appearance they all operate in very similar ways.

### When can you use a valve?

- If you need to use a catheter for more than a few days.
- If you had a catheter attached to a bag for several weeks or months and you are planning a trial without the catheter.
- If you need a catheter for the rest of your life.

### Why should you use a valve?

Valves have a number of benefits.

- Provides dignity as they are small and discreet.
- Provides comfort as you do not have to carry a urine bag on your leg or on a stand.
- Helps you manage your bladder problem independently from others.
- Reduces the risk of hurting your bladder and other sensitive parts of your body as you minimise carrying tubes and weight (eg urine bag) on the outside of your body;

- Encourages you to keep mobile and encourages use of hands and dexterity;
- Maintains your bladder's elasticity and capacity as the bladder is not made redundant by using an outside bag.
- May help reduce other complications such as catheter blockages and infections.
- If used both at day and night time, a valve helps you keep your day and night time body rhythm.

Valves can be connected to leg-bags and two-litre bags. This is useful if you suffer from night time bladder problems. You can leave the valve's lever open to drain urine directly into a bag without having to wake up to use the toilet.

If you cannot get to the toilet safely to empty your valve you can use a valve and bag connected together. You can turn the valve open at regular intervals to drain urine into the bag. This will still be beneficial to your bladder health particularly if you are using a catheter long-term.

Remember! You can use bottles, bowls, small buckets or other containers to empty your bladder through the valve. You do not have to go to the toilet unless it is safe to do so.

## Are there any reasons not to use a valve?

You should not use a valve if you have:

- Poor hand movement preventing you from operating the valve independently.
- Very poor memory.
- Serious problems with your kidneys. A health professional should help you finding out if this is the case.
- Avoid using it if you have an acute urinary tract infection.
- If you doctor has told that you have reduced bladder capacity.
- If you have no bladder sensation (feelings). Your continence nurse or your health professional will advise you.

If you suffer from bladder contractions (spasms) or if you have been using a drainage bag for a very long time, your bladder may not work well with a valve. You may have to open the valve very frequently to drain your bladder as a result of your bladder having become small bladder or because of spasms. You may also experience urinary leakage outside the catheter. A continence nurse or health professional can advise you further.

## How often should the valve be used to empty the bladder?

If you have bladder sensation your bladder will tell you when it is getting full and when it is time to empty it;

- If your bladder sensation is affected but you have a good memory you can empty your valve at regular intervals of 2 to 4 hours every day. You should be able to store urine at night or if this does not work you can attach the valve to a bag and leave it on free drainage at night.
- If you suffer from bladder spasms you may need to empty your bladder more often at day and night time. Speak to your continence nurse or health professional as there may be other interventions to help this problem.



Catheter Valve with tap in **open** position (face down for open). Product image used with permission from Flexicare

## How often does the valve require changing?

Catheter valves are normally changed every 5 to 7 days. If you or your carer can change the valve you will receive further education regarding how to do it safely. Sometimes a district nurse, staff nurse or other health professional will change the valve for you.

It is a good idea to write the last date of change on the valve or on a calendar to remind you when the next change is required.

## Disposal of the catheter valve

When you replace the valve you can dispose of the old one in a normal domestic bin. You can wrap it up in a piece of toilet paper or kitchen roll or a small nappy bag before throwing it away.

## Preventing infections and complications

Catheter valves must be changed avoiding contamination of the catheter. If you wish to change your own valve ensure you have received training to do so.

- Remember to always wash your hands before and after touching the valve.
- If you wear fairly tight underwear you might be able to tuck the valve inside it. Alternatively consider using a catheter securement device. This is like a plaster or soft strap to prevent pulling of the catheter and valve.
- If you drain urine into a receptacle ensure it is rinsed with water and soap on a daily basis.
- You can bath or shower regularly with a catheter and valve.
- If you do not bath or shower: ensure that catheter, valve and the point of catheter exit from your body are cleaned daily with warm water and soap.



G-Strap securement device  
Product image used with  
permission from Coloplast Ltd

## Catheter valve troubleshooting

It is very unlikely for a valve to stop working because of mechanical problems. If your valve is not draining any urine:

- Ensure you have drunk enough fluids. Sometime hot weather, running a temperature or other illnesses (eg sickness or diarrhoea) can make you lose a lot of fluids with less urine being produced.
- Check the catheter to ensure the tube is not kinked. Re-position it if necessary.
- Check the valve and ensure you have turned the lever down all the way. Some valves have a safety feature and will not start draining until the lever is turned down all the way.
- Ensure you are not heavily constipated as this may stop the catheter from draining. Ensure you always prevent constipation by eating a healthy diet and drinking enough fluids (1.5 – 2litres a day) on average.
- If you feel abdominal discomfort or a feeling of full, painful bladder it is very likely that the catheter has become blocked. Avoid going to the Emergency Department. Contact your district nurse or other team in charge of your care (eg at home services, rapid response services), out-of-hours Doctor. They should prioritise your call to avoid hospital admission and replace your catheter and valve promptly.

- Ensure you always keep at home a spare catheter, lubricating gel, a dressing pack and a spare valve for unplanned changes. All of these are available on prescription from your GP or home delivery service.

## Contact us

**Elaine Hazell** (continence nurse specialist, urology) **t: 020 7188 6783**

**Ellie Stewart** (clinical nurse specialist, urogynaecology) **t: 020 7188 3671**

**Florence Ilegbusi** (continence nurse specialist, elderly care) **t: 020 7188 2083** or **020 7188 2093**

Bladder and Bowel UK Helpline **t: 0161 607 8219** Monday to Friday 9.00am-4.30pm

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit **w: [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**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm

## Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

**t: 020 7188 8801** (PALS)                      **e: [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)**

**t: 020 7188 3514** (complaints)           **e: [complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk)**

## Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch. **t: 020 7188 8815**    **e: [languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk)**

## 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 website

Online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing. **w: [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)**

## Was this leaflet useful?

We want to make sure the information you receive is helpful to you. If you have any comments about this leaflet, we would be happy to hear from you, fill in our simple online form, **w: [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets)**, or **e: [patientinformationteam@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:patientinformationteam@gstt.nhs.uk)**

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