



# The British Association of Urological Surgeons

## Urethral catheters

### Looking after your bladder catheter

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This leaflet gives you simple, easy-to-read details about how to care for your catheter. Expert doctors in the UK have written it. Please also remember the advice your own doctor or nurse has already given you.

#### Key points

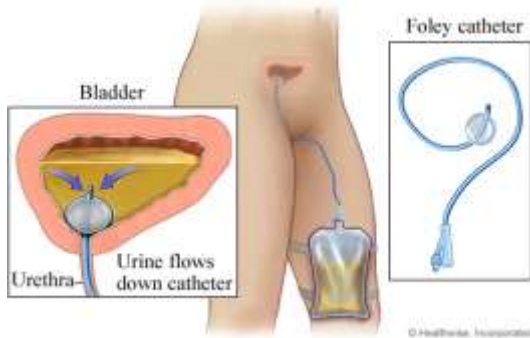
- A catheter is a small soft tube. It is made of latex or silicone.
- It is put into your bladder to drain your pee.
- There are 2 ways the tube gets to your bladder:
  - It goes in through the pipe that carries your pee out of your bladder. We call this your urethra.
  - It goes directly into your bladder through your skin. It comes out at the lower part of your tummy. We call this a suprapubic catheter.
- The catheter tube is connected to a bag. Your pee drains into the bag. You carry the bag with you all the time. It can be attached to your leg or your tummy. Your bladder is kept empty.
- The catheter tube can be connected to a valve instead. The valve acts like a tap. Your bladder fills up normally. You will need to drain your pee by opening the valve.
- You should change the bag and valve every week.
- You should have a new catheter put in at least every 3 months.
- All the equipment you need is provided on prescription. You will get the prescription from your GP.
- Common problems are:
  - blockages
  - pain
  - infections that keep coming back
- It is normal for bacteria to be found in your pee when you have a catheter. This usually does not need treatment. You only need antibiotics if you feel unwell or have signs of an infection.
- Most people manage well.
- If you do have problems, your district nurse or GP can usually help.

#### What is a catheter?

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## How your catheter works

The catheter goes into your bladder. It is kept there using a small balloon. The balloon is inflated when the catheter is put in.

Your catheter is connected to a soft bag. This bag is strapped to your leg or tummy. It collects pee and keeps your bladder empty. You can empty the bag when it gets full.

Sometimes, the catheter is connected to a valve instead of a bag. This means your bladder fills with pee normally. When you feel full, you can open the valve to let the pee out. This means you do not need to wear a bag.

## Different types of catheters

Catheters are made from different materials. Some are made with latex. If you have ever had a latex allergy, tell your doctor or nurse. They will use a catheter that does not contain latex.

## Getting used to the catheter

At first, the catheter may feel strange. You may feel very aware of it. You might feel like you need to pee all the time, even though the catheter is already draining your bladder.

This feeling is common and usually goes away quickly. It happens because your bladder is trying to push the catheter out. Your bladder may squeeze or go into spasm. After a short time, your bladder gets used to the catheter. The feeling of needing to pee all the time usually stops.

## How to look after your catheter

Your catheter is part of your body while it is in place. It needs to be cleaned every day.

- When you have a bath or shower, wash it with warm, soapy water.
- If you are a man:
  - Gently pull back your foreskin, if you have one.
  - Clean the tip of your penis and the catheter.
  - Then slide your foreskin forward again.

### *Drink plenty of fluids*

Drinking lots of fluid helps stop infections. Try to drink enough so your pee stays pale. If your pee looks dark, drink more.

### *Avoid problems with the tube*

Make sure the catheter tube is not bent or squashed. Keep the drainage bag lower than your bladder. If the bag is too high, pee will not drain properly.

### *Managing at home*

The nurses will show you how to empty your catheter bag. If you have a valve, they will show you how to use it. They will help you look after your catheter. They will also give you spare catheters and bags.

They will tell your GP and your district nursing team about your catheter. Your GP will give you prescriptions. You can get these from your local chemist.

You will be told who to contact if you have any problems with the catheter.

## **Parts of the catheter system**

### *The catheter*

This is the soft tube that drains pee from your bladder.

- Your catheter is easy to look after. Just keep it clean all the time.
- Wash yourself and the catheter every day.
- Dry your skin gently and well. This will stop it getting sore.
- If it feels sore, tell your nurse. They can help you feel more comfortable.

### *The leg bag*

This bag is attached to the end of the catheter. It collects pee during the day.

- The bag gets heavier as it fills.
- Do not let it get too full. A full bag can pull on the catheter. This may cause pain or bladder spasms. It may even move the catheter out of place.
- Empty the bag into the toilet or a pee bottle. Always wash your hands before and after.
- Leg bags can be used for a week. After that, they should be changed.

### *The leg-bag support*

This is like a sock without a foot. It holds the leg bag in place on your leg, so it stays secure.

### *The G-strap*



This stops your catheter from being pulled out. It has a Velcro strap, which goes around the catheter and your leg. This should be fitted gently so that it does not pull on the catheter.

### *The night drainage bag*

You can use a large drain bag at night. You can connect it to your leg bag without needing to remove it. This bag holds more pee, so you can sleep through the night without needing to empty it.

To connect the night drainage bag:

1. Remove the leg-bag support.
2. Wash your hands.
3. Empty the leg bag.
4. With the tap still open, push the end of the night bag tubing into the leg-bag tubing. It fits below the tap. Your pee then goes from the leg bag into the night bag.
5. Put the night bag on its stand, by the side of your bed.

In the morning:

1. Turn off the tap at the bottom of your leg bag.
2. Take the night bag off.
3. Empty it into the toilet.

When you go home, your medical team will give you a small supply of leg bags and night bags to get you started.

Your GP will prescribe your supplies. You can collect these from your local chemist with a prescription.

When you need to throw away a used bag:

- Rinse it with water.
- Put it in a plastic bag.
- Put it in your normal household rubbish.

## **What problems might happen at home?**

Sometimes, problems can happen with your catheter. If they do, your district nurse, GP or nurse can help you.

### **Bladder spasms**

Bladder spasms feel like cramps in your tummy. They happen when your bladder tries to push out your catheter.

If the spasms are bothering you, your GP can give you medicine to help relax your bladder.

### **Leaking around the catheter**

This is called “by-passing”. It means pee leaks around the catheter instead of going through it.

This can happen:

- When your bladder goes into spasm
- When you have a poo
- If the catheter gets blocked and cannot drain properly

A small amount of leaking is normal. You may not be able to do anything to stop it.

## Cloudy pee or blood

If your catheter has been in for a while, your pee may turn cloudy. You may see small bits in your pee. We call this debris. It can block the catheter.

If your catheter stops draining, contact your nurse or GP.

If you see blood in your pee, let your nurse or GP know. You may have an infection. Sometimes more tests are needed to find out the reason.

## Blocked catheter

A blocked catheter can be painful and needs urgent help.

Check:

- The drainage bag should be lower than your bladder. Keep it below your hips.
- Make sure the catheter and tubing are not bent or twisted.
- Make sure there are no clots or bits blocking the tube.

If pee is not draining and the catheter stays blocked, contact your nurse or GP straight away.

## Catheter falls out

If your catheter falls out, contact your nurse straight away. They can put a new one in.

If this keeps happening, you can see a bladder specialist for more help. Talk to your GP.

## Infection

It is normal for bacteria to be found in your pee when you have a catheter. This usually does not need treatment. You only need antibiotics if you feel unwell or have signs of an infection.

Contact your nurse or GP if you have:

- A high temperature
- Pain in your bladder
- A sore feeling where the catheter goes in

They may send a sample of your pee to be tested. They can then decide if you need antibiotics.

## What should you do with this leaflet?

You can keep this leaflet. If you have more questions, ask your doctor or nurse. They can explain more.

## Online access

You can see this leaflet on the internet. Scan the special picture (QR code).

## Feedback

We'd love to know what you think! You can share your thoughts by emailing us at [admin@baus.org.uk](mailto:admin@baus.org.uk)



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