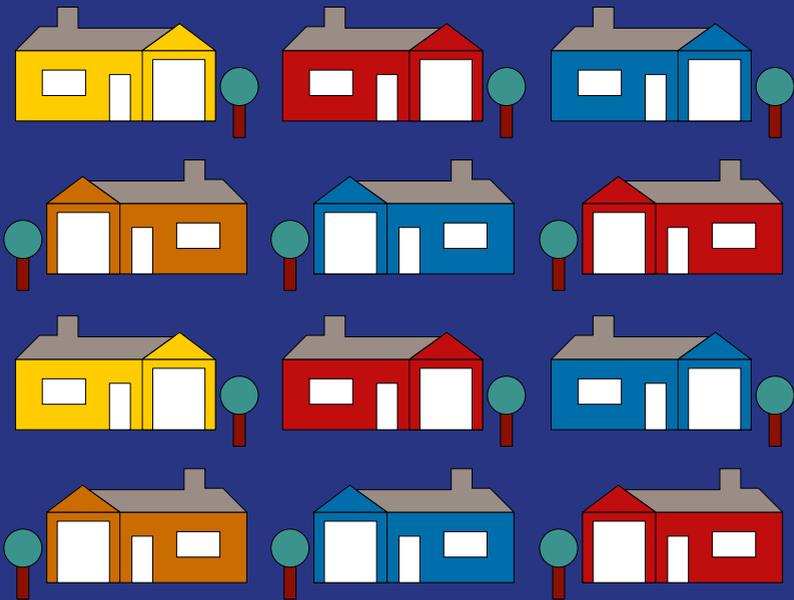


Living at home with a urethral urinary catheter



**A guide for patients  
and care givers**

## Useful Contacts

District Nurse  
Daytime  
Telephone Number:

District Nurse  
Out of Hours  
Telephone Number:

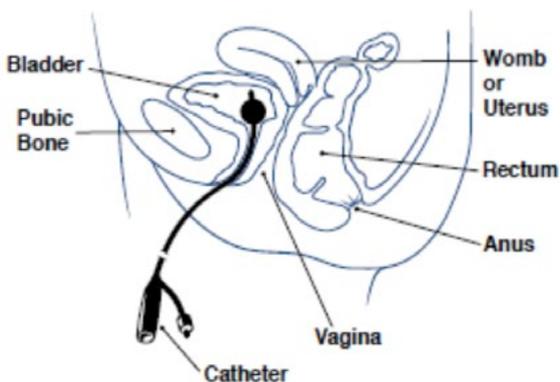
District Nurse  
Weekend  
Telephone Number:

Augmented  
Home Care  
Telephone Number:

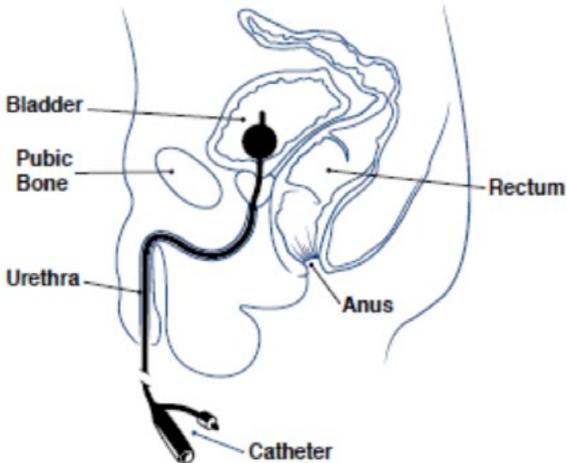
# WHAT IS A CATHETER?

A catheter is a hollow, flexible tube which is used to drain urine from your bladder into an external bag. The tip of the catheter (which sits inside your bladder) is held in place by a small balloon with some sterile water in it. Having a catheter replaces the need to pass urine in the toilet.

**Female Urinary Tract with Catheter in place**



**Male Urinary Tract with Catheter in place**



# CATHETER DRAINAGE BAGS:

There are two types of catheter bag:

- **a leg bag**

- o this is a smaller discrete drainage bag
- o comes in three different sizes: 350ml (12fl Oz), 500ml (3/4 pint) 750ml (1 ¼ pint)
- o is used during the day under clothing
- o can also sit inside your thigh with a Velcro strap
- o a leg bag can be attached to a larger drainage bag overnight
- o the leg bag is usually changed every seven days

- **a drainage bag**

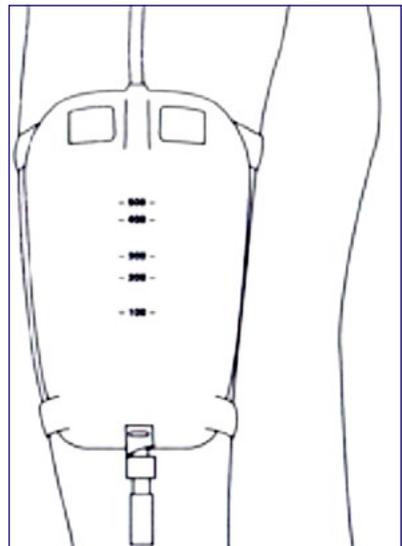
(this is a large bag used at night or when a patient is bedbound)

The connection between the catheter tubing and the catheter bag is a route where potential infection can enter your bladder. It is therefore important that disconnecting the tubing from the bag is kept to a minimum (for example, only when the leg bag is being changed).

## CATHETER VALVE:

Some patients are able to use a catheter valve instead of a catheter bag: this depends on their clinical condition.

For further information ask your district nurse.



## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE BAG FILLS UP?

As the leg bag fills, it gradually gets heavier and you will feel a strain on the straps. **Do not let your bag get too full.**

To empty a leg bag, open the tap at the bottom of the bag and let the urine drain, into a toilet, if possible. If you find this difficult, you can use a container, but you must keep it for this purpose only. Do not forget to close the tap again after you have emptied the bag, and always wash your hands.

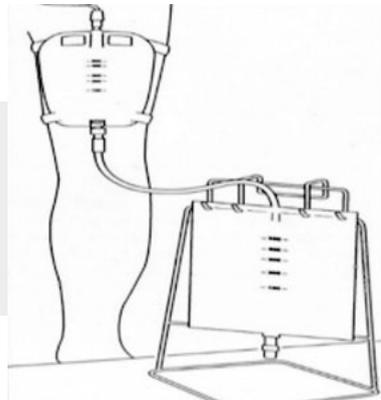
## WHAT HAPPENS AT NIGHT?

When you go to bed, connect your leg bag to a night bag. Your district nurse will show you how to do this. This can hold more urine, so that you do not have to get up at night to empty the bag. Loosen your leg straps when you get into bed.

**Do not allow the leg bag to lie on the floor.**

Support it on a special hanger or floor stand.

**Remember, urine cannot drain uphill, so always keep the bag lower than your bladder.**



## HOW OFTEN SHOULD I CHANGE THE BAG?

The Department of Health recommends that a leg bag should be changed once a week. If it gets damaged, is difficult to empty or becomes uncomfortable to wear, you can change it sooner.

## HOW SHOULD I DISPOSE OF THE BAG?

Before throwing away your drainage bag, empty it and wash it out.

Bags should be wrapped in newspaper or a plastic bag and placed in the wheelie bin.

Do not burn the bags in an open fire.

## HOW DO I STORE CATHETERS AND BAGS?

It is important to store spare catheters and bags in their original packaging in a dry, safe place away from direct heat and sunlight.

## IS MY PERSONAL HYGIENE IMPORTANT?

If you keep infection at bay, your catheter should not cause any problems. So remember these simple rules:-

- Wash the skin in the areas where the catheter enters your body with mild soap and warm water at least twice a day.
- Dry the area thoroughly. Never use talcum powder or creams.
- Wash your hands before and after connecting or changing a drainage bag, and after every bowel motion.
- Try to have a bath or shower every day.  
(You can do this with your leg bag attached.)

Men should wash carefully under their foreskin.

Women should, make sure they wash around their anus (back passage) to keep bacteria away from the catheter.

## WHAT SHOULD I DRINK?

To make sure your catheter drains well you need to drink at least 2-3 pints (or 6-9 cups) of liquid every day, for example water.

## WHAT SHOULD I EAT?

Your normal diet is fine, but try and have plenty of fresh fruit, vegetables and cereals to provide sufficient fibre to avoid constipation. A full bowel can press on the catheter and stop urine flowing freely. Please talk to your doctor or nurse if you have this problem.

## CAN I STILL HAVE SEX?

The answer is yes, if you take the following steps:-

- Men can tape the catheter along their penis and apply a condom.
- The woman should tape the catheter out of the way, along their abdomen.
- Before sex, both partners should wash their genitals thoroughly.
- It helps to use plenty of water-soluble lubricants, such as K-Y Jelly\*, but not Vaseline\*\*.
- After sex, both partners should wash their genitals thoroughly again.

**If your catheter is causing you problems during sex do not hesitate to discuss it with your district nurse or family doctor.**

# COMMON COMPLICATIONS

## What problems might I experience with my catheter?

While most of the time your catheter will work fine and you should not experience any discomfort or problems, there will be times when this is not the case. The following is a list of common problems and their causes. In the following sections you will find information on what you can do to help yourself and details of when you should call for help.

### No urine in the leg bag:-

This may require a very simple task. If this does not help, please contact your district nurse.

Possible Cause	Action
Tubing Kinked	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make sure all the tubing you can see is straight and not trapped in any way</li><li>• Move your position if you can and this should help the flow of urine.</li></ul>
Constipation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Being constipated can cause pressure on the bladder and urethra and block the flow of urine.</li><li>• Make sure you eat a high fibre diet with plenty of fluids.</li><li>• If this does not help, speak to your district nurse.</li></ul>
Constipation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sediment in the urine can cause the catheter to block.</li><li>• Make sure you drink plenty of fluids.</li><li>• Contact the District Nurses, they may have to replace your catheter or administer a catheter lavage, i.e. washing out of catheter.</li></ul>

## Leaking or bypassing catheter:-

Most catheters can leak a little. If this does not resolve or gets worse contact your district nurse for further advice.

Possible Cause	Action
Tubing Kinked	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Follow the steps above to help reduce any kinks and retain the flow of urine.</li></ul>
Bladder Spasm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● This can settle on its own if not contact your District Nurse.</li></ul>
Constipation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Pressure on the bladder may lead to leakage from the catheter.</li><li>● See advice above.</li></ul>

## Infection:-

Infection can happen with any artificial device inserted into the body. If the advice below does not help this problem contact your district nurse.

Possible Cause	Action
Catheter Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Check for sediment, blood and a foul smell from urine.</li><li>● Always maintain good catheter care as per district nurse advice.</li></ul>
Contamination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Because of where the catheter is, there is a risk of faecal contamination.</li><li>● Maintain good personal hygiene.</li><li>● Make sure you eat a good diet and plenty of fluids to avoid constipation or diarrhoea.</li></ul>

## Bleeding:-

There may be a small amount of bleeding when the catheter is initially inserted, but otherwise there should be no bleeding.

Possible Cause	Action
Infection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• See advice above. If there is excessive bleeding in the drainage bag or on your skin, contact the district nurse.</li></ul>
Trauma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pulling and friction can cause some bleeding.</li><li>• Make sure you have your catheter securely taped to your thigh and a leg strap round the bag. If the bag is on a stand keep this close by.</li><li>• Empty the leg bag so it is not heavy.</li><li>• Discuss with your district nurse if this does not resolve.</li></ul>
Heavy/persistent Bleeding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This is rare and you should seek to get medical advice.</li></ul>

## Pain and discomfort:-

It is unusual for your catheter to be painful. You may experience some slight discomfort if the catheter is pulled, if your catheter is painful, contact your district nurse.

## Catheter falls out:-

This is rare. There is a balloon on the catheter to keep this securely in your bladder, but if this does happen contact your district nurse.

## Changing your leg bag or catheter valve:-

If the leg bag or valve has been on for too long it can get encrusted with debris and be difficult to change.

Possible Cause	Action
Encrustation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep the catheter line clean and free from debris or contamination</li> <li>• Clean the connection before changing leg bag.</li> <li>• If necessary use warm water.</li> <li>• Gently twist the leg bag tubing, not the catheter</li> <li>• You can roll the latex catheter port away from the device to try to free it.</li> <li>• If this does not work contact your district nurse.</li> </ul>

Patient Information	
Catheter Inserted: Date	
Size of Catheter:	
Type of catheter:	



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