Catheter Care
Advice for carers

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Introduction
This leaflet aims to provide advice and support to carers about indwelling catheters (retained inside the body for a certain period of time).

What is a urinary catheter?
A catheter is a thin, flexible, hollow tube designed to drain urine from the bladder.

The catheter is kept in place by a small balloon at its tip, filled with sterile water, which prevents it from falling out.

It is inserted into the bladder through the urethra. This is a small opening above the vagina in women, and runs through the length of the penis in men.

Some people have a catheter inserted into the bladder through an incision in the abdominal wall. This is known as a supra pubic catheter.

Why do people need a catheter?
Some people find it difficult to pass urine and may not be able to empty their bladder, so a catheter is inserted to drain the urine.

Catheters are also used before and after surgery, to introduce medication into the bladder and sometimes to manage urinary leakage if this cannot be managed effectively in any other way.

Caring for an indwelling catheter

Fluid intake
It is important to maintain an adequate fluid intake to prevent dehydration, constipation, concentrated urine and irritation of the bladder.

Unless the doctor has prescribed otherwise, it is important to drink 1.5 litres to 2 litres in 24 hours or as tolerated.

This will also help to reduce a build-up of deposits that may block the catheter from draining properly.

It is advisable to avoid caffeine, which is found in coffee, tea, cola and chocolate. It is important to reduce caffeine gradually as the person may suffer withdrawal symptoms.

Fluids are also contained in foods such as soups, stews, ice cream, ice lollies and jelly.

Dietary intake
A healthy balanced diet is recommended and will help to maintain a regular bowel pattern. Constipation can prevent a catheter draining freely. A full bowel can press on the catheter and is a common cause of urinary leakage around the catheter.

Personal hygiene
Good personal hygiene is important when a person has a catheter to prevent urinary infections.

Before handling the catheter or drainage system, ensure you wash your hands and wear protective clothing and non-sterile gloves.

Wash the skin in the area where the catheter enters the body with mild soap and water at least once a day.

- **Males** – carefully wash under the foreskin (unless circumcised). Dry the area thoroughly and ensure the foreskin is replaced over the end of the penis

- **Females** – always wash the genital area from front to back, to prevent contamination from the back passage. Dry the area thoroughly.

Avoid using talcum powder, antiseptic, bubble bath or bath salts and creams. These can cause irritation.

Before a shower or a bath, empty the drainage bag.

Do not remove the leg bag when the individual has a bath or shower as it is important to maintain a closed drainage system.

For supra pubic catheters, initially the person may need to wear a dry dressing around the incision site, however once healed this is not necessary.

Maintaining a closed drainage system
Maintaining a closed drainage system reduces the number of bacteria that can enter the catheter system. These bacteria can cause an infection.

- ensure a steady flow of urine and secure the drainage bag below the level of the bladder day and night

- use a catheter fixation device to minimise catheter movement and to maximise comfort

- empty the drainage bag when three-quarters full, use a single use container and do not let the drainage tube touch the container

- change the leg bag weekly or as per manufacturer’s instructions

- at night connect a single use, two-litre drainage bag to the outlet of the leg bag, ensuring the tap is open to allow drainage of urine. Hang on an appropriate stand. Remove and discard each morning, ensuring the outlet of the leg bag is closed

- drainage bags may be disposed of in the dustbin, providing they have been emptied and wrapped in a suitable bag

- catheter valves are sometimes used as an alternative to a leg bag and are connected directly to the catheter outlet. It is possible to attach an overnight bag to a valve.
Blockage of the catheter

Check:

• that the catheter tubing is not kinked or restricted by tight clothing
• that the drainage bag is connected correctly, and ensure the straps that secure the leg bag are positioned behind the leg bag tube
• that the drainage bag is not too full
• that the leg bag or night drainage bag is positioned below the level of the bladder
• constipation can restrict the catheter from draining effectively

If the catheter is still blocked, seek advice from a healthcare professional.

For further information or advice

If you are unsure about any of the information in this leaflet, or have further questions, please get in touch with the single point of contact for your area:

**Norwich Locality:** 01603 776625  
**South Locality:** 01953 609419  
**North Locality:** 01692 408027  
**West Locality:** 01553 668777

You can receive help with queries about NHS services from the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

**Tel:** 0800 088 4449  
**Email:** pals@nchc.nhs.uk

If you would like this publication in large print, Braille, alternative format or in a different language, please contact us on 01603 697300 and we will do our best to help.

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