Urinary Indwelling Catheter

This information will help you care for a urinary indwelling catheter at home. It will answer many of your questions. Please ask your doctor or nurse any other questions that you may have.

The Urinary System

To understand how the urinary catheter works, you need to become familiar with the urinary system (See Figure 1).

The system’s main purpose is to remove urinary waste products from the body. Urine is produced in the kidneys, moves through the ureters and is stored in the bladder until urine is emptied.

The indwelling catheter is a soft, flexible tube passed through the urethra into the bladder. The catheter is held in place by inflating the balloon end inside the bladder. The other end of the catheter is connected to an external collection device (bag).

The urine no longer is stored in the body but flows continuously into the collection bag. There are 2 types of collection devices: a drainage bag and a leg bag. The leg bag is used when you are walking or sitting. The large drainage bag is used when you are sleeping or lying flat.
How to Care for Your Indwelling Catheter

You will need to clean the area around the catheter once a day (and for women, after every bowel movement). This will help prevent germs from entering your bladder. (See Figures 2 and 3.)

- Begin by washing your hands.
- Clean the area where the catheter enters your body (or tip of penis) with a wash cloth and mild soap and water. Rinse the soap off with water.
- Now clean the catheter. Use a wash cloth and mild soap and water. Start where the catheter leaves your body and wash along the outside of the catheter for 3 to 4 inches.
- Secure the catheter with tape or a Foley catheter holder to the outside of your thigh. Allow enough slack so that the catheter will not pull when you move your leg.
- You may notice dried crusts around the outside of the catheter. These can be removed by gently wiping with a wet wash cloth. Do not use alcohol on the area where the catheter enters the body or on the tip of the penis; this is very drying to the skin and can cause irritation. If crusts are hard to remove, pour an ounce of hydrogen peroxide over them. Let peroxide soak in for about a minute. Then rinse and wash with soap and water.

Each time you separate or reconnect the catheter from the drainage system:

- Wash your hands.
- Clean the end of the catheter and the end of the drainage tube with a cotton ball soaked in 70 percent rubbing alcohol or an alcohol swab.

After each bowel movement, women should take care to wipe the anal area from front to back, away from the catheter.
Collection Devices

Replace drainage bags (Figure 4) with a new bag each time the catheter is changed.

How to Change from a Drainage Bag to a Leg Bag

- Wash your hands.
- Attach one strap of the leg bag to your leg.
- Start with the upper strap.
- Clean the connection between the catheter and the drainage bag with an alcohol swab.
- Gently tap the connection to drain any urine left in the tube down into the bag.
- Hold the catheter with one hand. Grasp the tubing with the opposite hand. Work the connection loose by using your thumb to push up on the end of the catheter.
- Pinch the catheter closed and pull the drainage bag tubing out. Insert the leg bag tubing into the catheter.
- Attach the second strap of the leg bag to your leg.
- Empty the drainage bag and rinse it with cool water.

How to Change from a Leg Bag to a Drainage Bag

- Wash your hands.
- Clean the connection between the catheter and the leg bag with an alcohol swab.
- Gently tap the connection to drain any urine left in the tube down into the leg bag.
- Hold the catheter with one hand. Grasp the tubing with the opposite hand. Work the connection loose by using your thumb to push up on the end of the catheter.
- Pinch the catheter closed and pull the leg bag tubing out. Insert the drainage bag tubing into the catheter.
- Empty the leg bag and rinse it with cool water.
**Special Instructions**

- Wear the larger drainage bag at night. Never go to bed with the leg bag on. Urine could backflow into the bladder if the bag fills up.
- Before taking a nap, empty the leg bag. It is suggested that you wear the night drainage bag when lying down.
- Urine must always drain downhill. Always keep the leg bag, drainage tube and bedside bag below the level of your bladder.
- Avoid kinks in the drainage system.
- Empty the large drainage bag and the leg bag when three-quarters full to avoid causing an increase in pressure or infection.
- Do not place the large drainage bag directly on the floor, to prevent infection and allow urine to flow well.
- While in bed, don’t lie on the tubing.
- Keep everything clean. Once a day, rinse the leg bag and drainage bag, including tubing, with vinegar to reduce odor. Use 1 part vinegar to 3 parts water.
- After cleaning the drainage bag, hang the bag in the shower to dry out between uses.
- Discard drainage bags when damaged or when you can no longer remove odors with cleaning (most leg bags can be used for three months).

**To prevent infection:**
- Wash your hands before handling the catheter.

**Fluid Intake**

Your doctor may want you to increase the amount of liquids you drink every day. Drinking extra fluids helps to keep your urine flowing freely and prevents your catheter from becoming clogged. Unless you are told otherwise, try to drink a small glass of liquid every hour while you are awake. Other hints include the following:

- Drink small amounts of liquid often.
- Try room temperature liquids; they go down more easily.
- If you have no diet restrictions, alternate sweet, salty, warm and cold liquids so that you don’t get bored with the same taste.
- Include more liquids at your meal time.
- Remember, liquid means anything wet. This includes water, tea, coffee and carbonated beverages, as well as milk, ice cream and sherbet.
Avoid milk products if calcification in tubing is a problem. Calcification is a gravel or sand-like build-up inside the catheter wall. It can be recognized by rolling or squeezing the catheter between your fingers.

- Liquids also must be calculated in a diabetic diet.

**When to Call the Doctor**

Notify your doctor if any of the symptoms listed below occur:

- Temperature higher than 101.0° F.
- Chills.
- Pain radiating from the back to the side.
- Bloody urine, tea- or cola-colored urine.
- Cloudy urine with stringy pieces or clumps.
- No urine output in 2 to 3 hours.
- Urine leaking around catheter.
- Catheter comes out.
- Change in the usual odor of urine.
- Nausea and vomiting.

**Questions You May Want to Ask Your Doctor**

- Can I take a bath or a shower?
- Where can I get more equipment?
- Will my catheter need to be changed and who will change my catheter?
- When will my catheter be removed?
Health Information Resources

For more information, visit one of Northwestern Memorial Hospital’s Health Learning Centers. These state-of-the-art health libraries are located on the 3rd floor of the Galter Pavilion and on the 1st floor of the Prentice Women’s Hospital. Health information professionals are available to help you find the information you need and provide you with personalized support at no charge. You may contact the Health Learning Centers by calling 312-926-LINK (5465) or by sending an e-mail to hlc@nmh.org.

For additional information about Northwestern Memorial Hospital, please visit our Web site at www.nmh.org.