Using a Catheter to Empty Your Bladder

Instructions for Women

What is catheterization?

Catheterization is when you use a small tube, called a catheter, to drain urine from your bladder. You will slowly push a catheter into the small tube that connects to your bladder (urethra). When the catheter reaches the bladder, urine (pee) will come out on its own.

Many people have trouble completely emptying their bladder on their own. Having too much urine in the bladder for too long may:

- Cause a urinary tract infection.
- Stretch out your bladder (overdistention). This can make the muscles weak and not work as well.

Using a catheter is easy and does not take much time. Usually, you’ll need to do this several times a day. It depends on how often your body makes urine, how much feeling you have in your bladder and how much liquid you drink.

Following a schedule

We suggest emptying your bladder at least every 3 to 4 hours during the day and one time at night. Ask your doctor if you need to follow a different schedule.

- If getting up at night to catheterize causes you to lose too much sleep, try drinking fewer liquids after 7 p.m. This may help you sleep through the night.
- **Do not drink less during the day to avoid having to catheterize yourself.** It is important to get enough fluids.
- Your doctor may ask you to measure your urine volume in a special container.
- If you often empty a large amount of urine at one time (over 300 ml), you need to catheterize more often. (If you aren’t sure, you should measure your urine.)

- My schedule is:

  ________________________________
  ________________________________
  ________________________________
Supplies

- We may give you some supplies before you leave the hospital. When you run out, you will need to buy more from your pharmacy or a medical supply store. Ask your insurance company if supplies will be paid for by insurance.

- There are many different sizes and types of catheters to choose from (rubber, plastic). Your doctor will help you pick the one that is best for you. If you would like to switch to a different catheter later, your doctor can order it for you.

- Always be sure to have clean catheters ready and in handy places.

- You may wish to prepare a small bag with enough supplies for 1 day. Keep this nearby, such as in the glove compartment of your car.

Keeping your supplies clean

Your supplies do not need to be sterile (germ free), but they must be kept very clean. This will help prevent infection.

- Store clean, dry supplies in a covered plastic box or baggie. Keep them off the floor and away from direct heat (radiator).

- Always wash your hands well with soap and water before touching your supplies.

- Use a new catheter each time. If you must use the same catheter again (not recommended), clean it after each use. To clean your catheter:
  - Work up a lather with soap and water.
  - Clean the catheter inside and outside thoroughly. Use the lather—don’t rub the catheter on a bar of soap.
  - Rinse the catheter with warm water.
  - Let the catheter dry on a clean towel before placing it in a baggie or container.
  - Each catheter can be used for about 2 weeks.
  - If the catheter becomes too soft to work with or very cloudy, throw it away.

Get to know your body

Take some time to study the picture on the next page of your body. Practice finding the opening to your urethra (meatus). This will make it easier to put in the catheter, and it will take less time.

What you will need

- Catheter (new or freshly cleaned)
- Water-soluble lubricant, such as KY Jelly or Lubafax
- Soap and water or moist towelette
- Clean towels or washcloths
- Clean container to carry catheter, such as a plastic baggie, container or paper towel.
- Plastic measuring container (if measuring urine volume)
- Mirror, if needed
- Container to catch urine, if you will not be near a toilet
- A small bag for your glove compartment to store 1 day of supplies

*Keep this handout with your supplies so you can refer to it if you have questions.*
How to catheterize yourself

Catheterizing yourself in the bathroom will make it easier to wash your hands, dispose of urine and clean up.

1. Clean your work surface with alcohol or soap and water.
2. Wash your hands with soap and water.
   - Use hand sanitizer if you do not have soap and water.
   - If you are not able to clean your hands, you should catheterize yourself anyway.
3. Get your supplies ready (a list is on page 2).
4. Lubricate the first half inch of the catheter.
5. Sit or stand over a toilet. (Or use a container to catch the urine.)
6. Clean around the opening where the urine comes out (urethra) with soap and water or a moist towelette. Wipe from front to back.
7. Separate the labia and find the urethral opening. It is above the vaginal opening.
8. Insert the lubricated end of the catheter into the meatus. Point the open end of the catheter into the toilet or a container.
9. Gently push the lubricated end of the catheter into the urethra until urine begins to flow. (If the catheter goes into your vagina, remove it and try again.)
10. Once the urine stops flowing, gently press on the area near your pubic bone to help remove any urine sitting at the bottom of the bladder.
11. When you are done emptying your bladder, gently pull out the catheter.

Checking the amount of residual urine

Residual urine volume is the amount of urine left in your bladder after you have urinated on your own. If we have asked you to measure this, you will need to:

1. Put a measuring container in the toilet to catch urine. Urinate as you normally would.
2. Using a notebook, write down the amount of urine in the container. Empty the container and put it back into the toilet.
3. Catheterize yourself right away. Follow the steps in this booklet, but have the urine collect into the measuring container. Write down the amount of urine, then empty the container. This is your residual urine volume.
4. Bring your notebook of measurements to your next clinic visit.
Preventing urinary tract infections

Urine is usually germ free. If bacteria (germs) enter the urinary tract, it may cause an infection.

To help prevent urinary tract infections, always:

- Wash your hands well with soap and water before touching your supplies or using the catheter.
- Clean around your meatus before you catheterize.
- Use a new catheter each time. If you must reuse your catheter, keep it in a clean, covered container or plastic bag. Do not take the catheter out until you are ready to use it.
- Drink eight 8-ounce glasses of liquids per day. (This is the size of a regular coffee cup.)
- Ask your doctor if it is okay to have cranberry juice (regular or low sugar) or cranberry tablets every day.

When to call the doctor

Call your doctor if you have:

- A temperature over 100.5 degrees when taken by mouth
- Urine that is cloudy, a different color or that smells bad
- Pain or burning when you urinate or use a catheter
- A feeling that you need to urinate frequently or urgently
- Your pulse or heartbeat seems fast or like it’s racing

Glossary

Bladder—balloon-like pouch in your lower abdomen that collects and holds urine

Catheter—small tube used to drain urine from your bladder

Labia—the muscle and tissue that surrounds the vagina and urethral opening.

Lubricant—jelly-like substance placed on the tip of the catheter so it will slide in and out of the urethra easily

Residual urine—amount of urine left in your bladder after you urinate on your own

Sterile—germ free

Urethra—a small tube that connects your bladder to the outside of your body. Urine comes out through an opening called the meatus.

Urine—pee

Ask your healthcare team if you have any questions. We’re here to assist you.