



Living with an indwelling catheter



What is a catheter?

A catheter is a soft, hollow, and flexible tube that is inserted into your bladder to allow urine to exit the body. It allows you to empty your bladder if you have bladder problems or any nerve damage that affects your ability to pee. Indwelling catheters are designed to remain inside the bladder for a longer period of time and are changed every 4-8 weeks.

The catheter can either be inserted through the urethra – a urethral catheter – or through the stomach – a suprapubic catheter. To keep it from sliding out, a tiny balloon at the end of the catheter is inflated with water. When the catheter needs to be removed, the balloon has to be deflated first. Removing a catheter with the balloon still inflated can cause serious injuries and damage.



How does drainage work?

Your catheter, whether it's a urethral or suprapubic one, will be connected to an externally worn leg bag that collects urine. You can wear this bag either on your thigh or on your calf, it's totally up to you! The only thing to bear in mind is that the bags must sit lower than your bladder at all times. This is to reduce the risk of urine flowing back into your bladder, causing nasty urine infections. Are you wondering, how the bag will be held in place? Easy, there are specially designed leg bag straps or sleeves to make sure your bag stays where it should. Which option you use is, again, totally up to your own preference!



Are all leg bags the same? No, they come in different volumes, with different tube lengths and different taps. This makes it possible for you to choose a leg bag that works best for your individual requirements. For exercise, you can use a smaller one, whereas for longer car journeys you might opt for one with a bigger volume. Handy, right?

As your leg bag fills up with urine, it'll need to be emptied via the tap at the bottom. Simply switch the tap from closed to open when you're ready to empty it. It is best to do this when it's about 2/3 full but you can also do it before that, if that works better for you.

What should I do overnight?

Overnight, a leg bag might not be the best solution as this would mean that you'd have to get up to empty it. Instead, you can use an overnight drainage bag which has been designed with your beauty sleep in mind. They generally have a volume of 2 litres and should easily hold all the urine drained by your catheter during the night without you having to empty it. You can either connect the drainage bag to your leg bag (make sure the tap is switched to open!) or, if you prefer, you can remove the leg bag and attach the overnight bag directly to your catheter. You can keep your drainage bag either in a stand or hanger, whatever takes your fancy.



Are there any alternatives to a leg bag?

Yes! Catheter valves are a great alternative to a leg bag. They are a little tap that is connected directly to your catheter. With the valve closed, your bladder will fill up and, when you open the valve, it will empty, and urine will be able to leave your body. The probably greatest benefit of a catheter valve is the fact that it's super discreet and can be hidden easily. This is especially practical if your plan involves a swim and chill at the pool or beach.

As with everything, though, catheter valves aren't suitable for everybody. That's why it's super important that you speak to a healthcare professional before attempting to use one. They will assess your bladder tone and capacity to see whether a catheter valve is a suitable alternative for you.

Your Life with a Urinary Catheter

What about hygiene?

Keeping your hands clean is super important at the best of times, but when you're caring for your catheter, it's even more so! Make sure to always wash your hands before cleaning your catheter and its entry site. You should do this approximately twice a day – your nurse or doctor will tell you exactly – with mild soap and water. And always make sure to dry it thoroughly after you're done. Is your catheter entry site sore? Check if your catheter is chafing or if there's any physical trauma. If you can't spot anything but it's not getting better or even worse, give your healthcare professional a call.

It's best to avoid creams or powders, like talcum powder, anywhere near your catheter as this can lead to it becoming clogged or fully blocked. This means that urine can't drain freely anymore, and you might develop a urine infection.

About to hop in the shower or bath? Then it's best to empty your leg bag before but make sure to keep it on. If you don't want wet leg bag straps or a wet leg bag sleeve, you could keep one in the bathroom that you specifically use for bathing or showering.

Do I have to be careful about my diet?

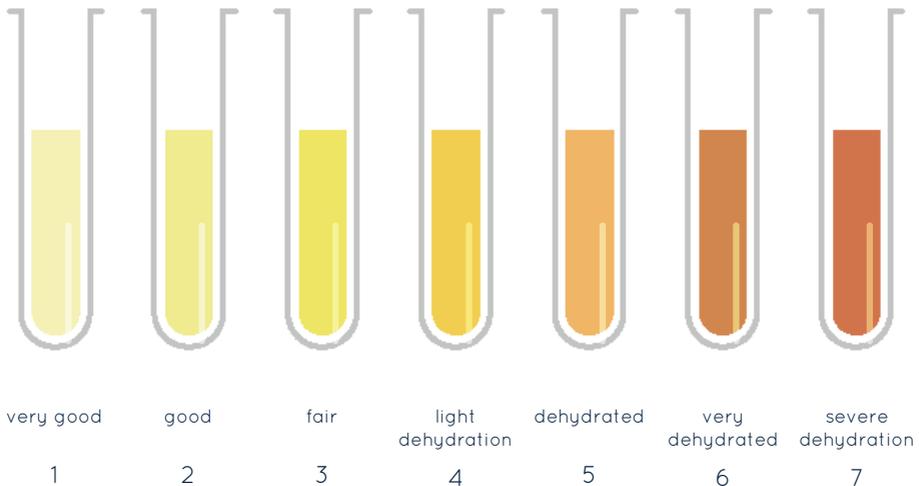
There aren't really a lot of dietary requirements that come with a catheter so make sure to just keep eating a healthy, balanced diet. If you're prone to constipation, you might want to try adding some more

fibre to your diet. You really want to avoid getting severely constipated with a catheter as a full bowel can put quite a bit of pressure on your bladder and your catheter which, in turn, can cause leakage.

What about my fluids?

With an indwelling catheter, you want to try and drink as much as possible. Try to aim for at least 1 to 2 litres per day! It's also a good tip to avoid too much caffeine and alcohol as they can really irritate your bladder. To keep your bladder nice and calm, clear fluids are best but don't deny yourself of the odd fizzy drink. That's still perfectly ok!

How do I know if I'm dehydrated? Easy! The colour of your urine should be anywhere between 1 and 3 on this chart. If it's between 4 and 7 instead, it's time for you to top up on the H₂O. Always bear in mind, though, that certain foods, drinks, and even medication can change the colour of your urine!



And what about sex?

Make sure to have a chat about your sex life with your nurse and doctor before getting your catheter inserted. There's no need to be ashamed; they're there to help with these kinds of questions! Why should you mention it? If you're sexually active and want to remain sexually active, a suprapubic catheter might be a much better option for you!

Travel advice

Is it time for your first trip away after getting your catheter inserted? It can feel a little scary and overwhelming. But don't worry, it's really not! You just have to plan a little more than you used to. If you want some more detailed advice on holidays with a catheter, download our "Travelling with your catheter" booklet!

How can I plan?

To make sure you've got everything you need, a travel checklist can come in really handy. You can either make your own or, if you don't fancy doing that, simply print out the one we attached for you at the end of this booklet. Make sure to get all your supplies in time before you're meant to leave for your trip. This should give you some peace of mind!

Travelling by plane

Travelling by plane is stressful at the best of times but with a catheter it can seem quite intimidating. It doesn't need to be, though! With the right preparation your next flight will be super easy. First off, make sure to check your airline's policy to avoid any unwanted surprises with your catheter supplies. Although there are some general hand luggage rules out there, each airline is different!



To make sure everything is smooth sailing, why not print out the travel certificate we attached for you? This will help you to get a private screening at the airport and it also helps with the supplies in your hand luggage.

When packing, make sure that you keep all your fluids in containers of maximal 100ml. It's also important that you empty your leg bag before going through airport security as urine counts towards the fluids rule.

Travelling by car or rail

For longer car or train journeys, you might want to opt for a 2L drainage bag instead of your usual leg bag. This will come in handy in case you get stuck in traffic or simply don't have access to a toilet for a while. There are specially designed drainage bag stands with covers to keep your bag stored away from prying eyes.

When you're going on a cruise

Cruises are a catheter friendly way to travel as they generally don't cause any hassle when it comes to your supplies. Once you've boarded the ship, make sure you know where all the toilets are so you can get to one if you need to. Also check out the medical room and ask how you can get in touch with the on-board doctor in case of an emergency.

Catheter Troubleshooting

Bypassing

Bypassing simply means that urine has found a way around the catheter which leads to unwanted leaks. How do you fix it? Start by checking that there are no kinks or twists in the tubing. If you can't find anything wrong there, make sure that your clothing isn't putting too much pressure on your catheter and tubes. If you are currently suffering from constipation, then this could be the reason for your bypassing issue. If that's the case, or if you can't find a reason for your leaks, speak to a healthcare professional about it.

Discomfort

Your catheter should generally not cause you any discomfort. If you're experiencing any, check that there is no pulling or tugging on your catheter and tubing and that your leg bag is well supported. If it's still uncomfortable for you, have a chat with your nurse or doctor about it as you might simply need a different size catheter, or one made from a different material.

Pain

Except for immediately after getting your catheter inserted, you should not experience any pain. So, if you have persistent pain or strong and frequent bladder spasms, contact your healthcare professional.

Dark, strong smelling urine

If your urine is suddenly darker and smelling strongly, you might be suffering from a urine infection. Try increasing your daily fluid intake. If this doesn't solve the problem or if you're starting to feel unwell, contact your nurse or GP as this will likely need medical attention.

Always bear in mind that certain foods, drinks, and medication can change the colour of your urine. So, if you had a lot of beetroot, a red tinge in your urine is no reason to panic!

Blockage

If you notice that your catheter hasn't been draining any urine for 2 to 3 hours and you're having belly aches, this might indicate that your catheter is blocked. Make sure that there are no kinks in your tubing and that your leg bag sits lower than your bladder. If this doesn't fix your problem, contact your healthcare professional immediately as a catheter blockage will require medical attention.

If you have any worries or are experiencing any problems, always contact your healthcare professional. If it's not an emergency, you can also get in touch with our lovely Customer Care team on 0344 225 1519. They'll be more than happy to help you out!

How to get in touch

If you have any further questions or just want a little chat, our lovely Customer Care team is here for you.

Opening hours:

Monday – Friday: 8am to 8pm

Saturday: 8am to 1pm

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