



# Your guide to catheters



## Different types of catheters

### Indwelling catheters

Indwelling catheters are designed to remain inside the bladder for a longer period of time and are usually 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.

### Urethral Catheter

A urethral catheter is inserted into your bladder through the urethra. This is the tube that connects your bladder to the outside and allows for urine to exit your body. Urethral catheters are generally made from silicone rubber or natural rubber and come in different sizes. Don't worry, though, you don't have to know which one is best for you – your nurse or doctor will work this out for you. Generally, the smallest size that allows for effective drainage will be used to reduce the risk of trauma to your urethra. If you're getting catheter after an infection or surgery, it might be a larger size for a little while as this minimises the risk of the catheter getting blocked by debris.

### Suprapubic Catheter

Other than a urethral catheter, a suprapubic catheter is inserted through a small hole in the abdomen. The procedure is generally done in hospital under general, epidural, or local anaesthetic. This will be different for every hospital and your nurse or doctor will be able to give you detailed information on how it will be done. The catheter itself is a flexible, hollow tube that's can be made out of certain types of plastic, silicone, or rubber.

## What are the benefits of a suprapubic catheter to a urethral catheter?

- No risk of damage to the urethra
- No risk of damage to the bladder neck by the balloon inside the bladder
- Minimises the risk of damage to the external sphincter
- Less likely to cause urinary infections than urethral catheters
- Less likely to be sat on and accidentally pulled
- Catheter site is easier to keep clean
- Doesn't interfere with any sexual activity
- A larger catheter can be used which reduces the risk of blockage in the catheter
- People often find suprapubic catheters more comfortable than urethral catheters

## What can you expect when you get an indwelling catheter?

The urine will usually be collected in a bag that you can either strap to your leg – a leg bag – or you can use a larger drainage bag with a stand or hanger. Always make sure that the stand or hanger are lower than your bladder, so urine doesn't flow back into it. For some people, a catheter valve might be an option. This is attached to the end of your catheter and, with the valve closed, it allows your bladder to fill up. To drain urine, the valve can be opened, and the bladder emptied. This isn't suitable for everyone, though. So it's important that you speak with your nurse or doctor before trying it!

## Side effects of indwelling catheters

### Bladder spasms

If you have an indwelling catheter, then it is very possible that you'll experience bladder spasms at some point. Why do they happen? They happen when your bladder tries to pass the balloon of your catheter. If you have particularly intense or frequent bladder spasms, speak to a healthcare professional as they will be able to give you some medication for it.

## Blockages

If you have an indwelling catheter, you might notice some small pieces of debris in your catheter tube. This is completely normal and nothing to be worried about! Sometimes, however, these pieces of debris can block your catheter which means that urine can't drain from your bladder. If this happens, you should contact your nurse or doctor immediately to avoid further complications like urinary infections.

## Pain & Discomfort

If you have an indwelling catheter for a prolonged period of time, this might cause you pain and discomfort. Speak to your nurse or doctor about it. They will be able to provide you with appropriate pain relief.

## Intermittent catheter

An intermittent catheter is inserted into the urethra on demand to empty your bladder and then removed again once your bladder is empty. If you are using an intermittent catheter you will be taught to catheterise yourself. Don't worry though, it's quite a straightforward technique that can be performed by most people fairly easily. Even children as young as seven or eight years old can be taught how to catheterise! There are also aids out there to help you if you have reduced hand function. An intermittent catheter isn't right for everybody, though, so it's important that you speak to your nurse or doctor first.

## Benefits of ISC

ISC is generally seen as the golden standard in the world of catheterisation – and that's for multiple reasons:

- It allows the bladder to recover and regain the ability to empty by itself
- It is more convenient when it comes to movement and sex
- You are likely going to feel a greater sense of being independent
- It reduces any risks associated with long-term catheters (e.g. urethral trauma, encrustation)
- It reduces the risk of urinary infections and urine flowing back into the kidneys
- It empties the bladder completely which stops a build-up of old urine

## Top tips

- Always make sure that your catheter doesn't get contaminated! Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water, give your downstairs area a good clean before inserting your catheter, and, most importantly, NEVER reuse a single-use catheter.
- Be gentle when catheterising! Use sufficient lubrication and don't force the catheter if you feel resistance. Rather take a minute, have a cuppa, and then try again. You might also have to try a few different intermittent catheters to find the one that works for you. So don't give up if it doesn't work immediately!
- Don't wait till the bladder is full to catheterise as this gives bacteria too much time to multiply which can lead to infections.
- Always make sure to empty your bladder completely! If you don't empty it fully, and urine remains in your bladder, this can cause bacteria to multiply and lead to infections.
- Don't start drinking less in order to not have to catheterise as much!

## Urinary Sheath

A urinary sheath is a catheter for men that is placed outside the body with no need for an inserting it in any way. It's also called a condom catheter because it looks a little bit like a condom and covers the penis head from which a tube generally leads to a drainage bag. This solution is known to be more comfortable and, as it stays outside the body, carries a lower risk of infection compared to an indwelling or intermittent catheter. Usually, a urinary sheath needs to be changed daily. Some options are designed for longer use, which can be great because it limits the risk of skin irritation. Please speak to your nurse or doctor to ensure that a urinary sheath is suitable for you before attempting to use one.

## Benefits

- Because urinary sheaths are non-invasive, many men find them a lot more comfortable compared to indwelling and intermittent catheters.
- Less likely to cause catheter associated urinary tract infections (CAUTIs) than indwelling catheters
- Provide a great alternative to incontinence pads
- Super easy to apply and remove
- Come with fewer movement restrictions than indwelling catheters

## Top tips

- If you're experiencing any leakage, have a chat with your nurse for an assessment as it is often a simple sizing issue.
- Always make sure to keep your leg bag or valve at a lower level than your urinary sheath to avoid urine flowing back into your bladder.
- Thoroughly wash your hands with soap before applying and removing your urinary sheath and make sure it doesn't touch any surfaces.
- Always read the user instructions if you're using a new urinary sheath as sizes and fitting are likely different from manufacturer to manufacturer.

## 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.

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Monday – Friday: 8am to 8pm

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