

CARING FOR YOUR CATHETER AT HOME

After surgery (radical prostatectomy) for prostate cancer you will have a urinary catheter for a short period of time and will need to go home with the catheter still in place.

Looking after your catheter and keeping your bladder healthy is easier if you are prepared with the correct information.

It is also important for you to know where you can get further advice and support as needed. At the end of the sheet there is a section about things you should find out before you go home, such as who to contact if you need help or supplies. It is best if you find these things out before your surgery.

Do not feel that you must manage alone when you go home – call someone if you need help or advice. Health care professionals very often help people at home with catheters.

Keeping clean

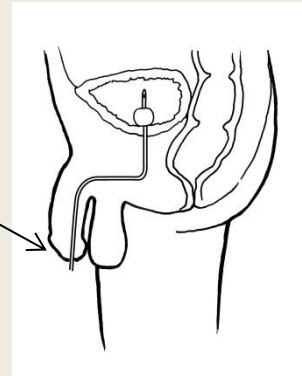
Normal hand-washing and hygiene becomes even more important when you have a catheter.



- You should wash your hands **BEFORE** you touch your catheter or collection bag. This helps avoid the catheter becoming infected by germs you may have on your hands from normal everyday activities.
- You should also wash your hands **AFTER** you touch your catheter or collection bag, in the same way as you would after you go to the bathroom normally

You should wash the area where the catheter exits the tip of your penis every day with water and unperfumed soap. Dry with clean paper tissues.

You can shower or bathe normally unless you have been instructed not to do so. The leg bag can be emptied and before bathing and left in place, with the valve closed.



Will my catheter need to be changed?

Most men will not have their catheter changed after prostate surgery, because normally it is only in place for a few weeks.

Moving around

It is important that you become active again as soon as you can after any surgery. This speeds recovery and also helps you to feel better and to return to normal. Moving around with a catheter can feel uncomfortable at first, but this will lessen with time.



When getting out of bed it may help if you lie on your side facing the edge of the bed first, and bend your knees up towards your chest. Then you can bring yourself up into a sitting position, allowing your legs to swing over the side of the bed. As with rising from a chair, stand up slowly and carefully.

In the days immediately after your surgery, you may avoid discomfort or pain by standing up or sitting down slowly and carefully, avoiding sudden movements. You may find sitting on firm surfaces uncomfortable because of pressure on the catheter inside your urethra. It can help to sit on a soft cushion.



Selection of Catheter securement devices

You should take care that the catheter does not get caught on anything and is not pulled when you move around as this can cause pain.

Wearing close-fitting underwear so that the catheter is held in place against your body can help to prevent the catheter getting pulled. Also, the tube to the leg bag can be secured with a strap against your thigh to prevent it tugging.

You will quickly learn the most comfortable way to do this so that the tube is slack enough to allow normal movement without tugging, but secure enough to prevent it getting caught on clothing or furniture.

It is possible to buy, or get on prescription in the UK, various devices to hold the catheter and the leg bag tubing in place to prevent it being pulled.

What can happen with a catheter that I should NOT worry about?

Having a catheter is a new experience for most men, and it is natural to worry about anything that seems “wrong”. But some things can happen with catheters that are not necessarily serious.



You may experience some small leakage of urine from around the catheter where it exits your penis. This can be inconvenient, but is normally not something to worry about. In fact, it is a sign that the urine cannot leak internally because the new join between your urethra and your bladder is healing.

It may help to wear an absorbent incontinence pad, and to use absorbent pads to protect furniture.



You may notice a small amount of mucous where the catheter exits your penis. You should keep the area clean. Wearing close-fitting underwear can help to prevent the catheter from moving about and irritating the penis.



Because your bladder is not used to having a catheter inside it you may experience bladder spasms. It may feel like your bladder is full and you have a strong and painful urge to urinate. These spasms usually pass quite quickly and become less with time as your bladder becomes accustomed to the catheter.



It is quite common to see small amounts of small blood clots in the drainage tube or collection bag. It can help to drink 1.5 litres of water or other non-caffeinated and non-alcoholic drinks to help clear small clots from the bladder.

When should I seek help?

Sometimes things go wrong with catheters. Most of the things that can happen are not serious, but putting them right may require the expertise of a healthcare professional. You should call your doctor or nurse if any of the following happen.

No urine in your collection bag

Often this is caused by a kink in the catheter or collection bag tube. Try repositioning yourself and the tubing, and watch to see if the flow starts again. If this does not help, contact your doctor or nurse. Sometimes the flow of urine can be stopped by a small blockage in the catheter. Usually this is easily cleared by a health care professional, who can “wash out” the catheter.

Heavy or persistent urine leakage

If leakage of urine from around the catheter where it exits your penis becomes heavy or persistent, it may be because the urine cannot flow through the catheter. As above, you can reposition yourself and the tubing and see whether this solves the problem. If not, contact your doctor or nurse.

Bleeding

A small amount of blood in the collection bag or around the catheter where it exits your penis in the days after your surgery is not something to worry about. But you should contact your doctor or nurse if you notice significant or increasing amounts of blood.

Continuing or worsening spasms

Some painful bladder spasms are to be expected when you first have a catheter. If they continue or get worse, you should ask for help. You may be prescribed medicines to settle your bladder.

Cloudy, dark or smelly urine

If your urine becomes cloudy, very dark in colour, or has a foul odour, you should contact your doctor or nurse. Drinking plenty of fluids can help to prevent this from happening.

Kidney infection

If you notice dull or acute pain in your lower back on one or both sides, or if you develop a fever, contact your doctor or nurse.

Your catheter falls out

It is very unusual for a catheter to fall out, but it can happen if the balloon holding it in place bursts. If this happens, contact your doctor or nurse. Depending on how long it has been since your surgery, they may need to insert a new catheter.

CATHETER REMOVAL

What happens when the catheter is removed?



Your catheter will be removed by a health care professional when they have decided that your urethra and bladder have healed.

Many men worry that removal will be painful, but most find it is only a little uncomfortable or not uncomfortable at all. Once the balloon that keeps the catheter inside your bladder is deflated, the catheter should slip out quite easily.

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You cough and the catheter's out, you don't even feel it
A man describing his experience of catheter removal

Bladder control after catheter removal

After your catheter is removed you may find you leak urine with little or no control (called urinary incontinence). Because of this you should make sure that you have an absorbent pad to wear after catheter removal and it may be advisable to have a pad to protect the car seat as well for travelling home.

In the weeks and months after catheter removal you may experience several different types of bladder control problems:

Frequency – you may need to go to the bathroom more *frequently* than you did before.

Nocturia – you may need to get up several times during the *night* to go to the bathroom.

Urgency – you may feel the *urge* to urinate very suddenly and may need to rush to the bathroom.

Urge incontinence - you may feel the *urge* to urinate very suddenly and may not make it to the bathroom in time and leak urine.

Stress incontinence – you may leak urine when anything puts pressure on the bladder, such as coughing, laughing or lifting.

Reduced bladder sensation – you may find it difficult to tell whether there is urine in your bladder.

Blockages can occur very rarely after prostate surgery. You should tell your doctor if you find it difficult to urinate or if the flow becomes weaker than normal, or stops and starts. You should seek help immediately if you cannot pass urine at all.

Help with managing bladder control problems and incontinence

Bladder problems and urinary incontinence can last for a few days in some men, and for months in others. Some men will remain incontinent for the rest of their lives. There is no way to tell who will be affected and who will not.

There are many different kinds of products for managing these problems. Information on these products can be found at www.continenceproductadvisor.org

Your doctor or nurse should be able to advise about specialist health services in your area that can offer help and advice.

Things to ask about before your surgery, or when you are admitted to hospital

So that you are prepared as well as possible, you should ask questions and gather useful information before your surgery rather than leaving it until afterwards.

You should ask questions about how to take care of yourself and your catheter when you go home, how you will get supplies that you may need, and who to contact if you need further help or advice.

If you have a partner it is a good idea to do this together: many partners do not feel confident about helping with a catheter without good information and support. If you live alone, you should ask about arranging for someone to visit.





Here is a checklist of things you might ask. You should write down the information in the spaces provided.

- When I go home, will a community nurse or home care nurse visit me to check that my catheter is OK? What is their contact number?
- Who can I contact for advice about managing my catheter? What is their contact number?
- Who can I contact if I think there is something wrong with my catheter? What is their contact number?
- Who can I contact for help or advice out of office hours? What is their contact number?
- Before I go home, will I be given the supplies I will need such as urine collection bags? Who should I ask about this?
- When I am at home, who will supply more urine collection bags or other supplies that I may need? What is their contact number?
- When will my catheter be removed, and who should I call if I don't receive an appointment?
- What is the contact number for the unit where you are having your surgery?
- When or why should I go to see my GP?
- When will my next appointment be to see my urologist?