You and Your Indwelling Catheter

Indwelling catheter equipment

- Indwelling catheter
- Connector
- Tubing
- Adjustable Velcro straps
- Connector
- Non-vented reusable latex bag
- Drain with cap
- A toilet or collection container for emptying the leg bag

The Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital, a 244-bed facility, is the largest freestanding rehabilitation facility in Canada, offering inpatient and outpatient care to all ages from preschool children to seniors. Founded in 1964, the Glenrose has earned a national reputation as a leader in patient care, research and education for health professionals in physical medicine, rehabilitation and geriatrics.

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Your indwelling catheter

Your indwelling catheter empties urine from your bladder.

The indwelling catheter has instructions, follow them carefully.

Use the smallest sized catheter so that your urethra (opening that drains urine from your body) is not overly stretched. An inflated balloon on one end of the catheter holds it inside your bladder. A 14 Fr catheter with a 5cc balloon is the size recommended to use.

Balloons that are too large (inflated too much) or those that have slipped into the urethra may cause:

- muscle spasms in the bladder
- sweating
- headaches
- cramps in the lower stomach
- injury to the bladder or urethra
- autonomic dysreflexia

If you have any of these problems see your doctor or notify the home care nurse as soon as possible. Always change your catheter if it causes irritation or doesn't drain your urine. Less expensive latex catheters are best for short term only (less than one week). Silastic or teflon catheters work best for long term (longer than one week) because catheters made of this material reduce crusting and irritations. Pure silicone catheters work well if frequent blockage has been a concern.
Drainage Bag

Below the Bladder
Drainage bags should always be placed below the level of your bladder so that gravity will cause your urine to flow downward.

To the Leg
Secure your catheter to your lower leg with an adjustable leg bag strap. Fabric leg straps work well because the wide, woven straps resist rolling or slipping on the leg.

Some Slack
Allow some slack in the catheter so that if you change positions the catheter doesn’t get pulled down into your urethra.

Not too tight or too loose
If the straps are leaving marks or causing swelling, loosen them. You don’t want them gripping your skin too snuggly. You may need to adjust it to get the right fit.

Alternate legs
One day wear your leg bag on your left leg; the next day, wear it on your right leg. Alternating your legs will help prevent pressure sores from developing.
Emptying your leg bag

Always wash your hands
Then remove the stopper or cap and drain all the urine, either into the toilet or into a measuring container.

Avoid touching the drain tip with your fingers or with the container. Empty all the urine, swab the drain and cap with an alcohol swab. Replace the cap.

Always use a clean bottle for emptying your leg bag (e.g. a clean medium-sized plastic vinegar bottle). The bottle should be washed daily with soap and water, then rinsed. You can also empty your bag into the toilet.

Never let the bag become too full. If your doctor has requested it, record the amount of urine drained in the leg bag.

Daily catheter care

Twice a day
Wash the skin and first few inches of the catheter; start with the area of the catheter closest to your body and work outwards.

- Use a clean cloth with a mild non-perfumed soap and water.
- Remove any crusting on the catheter. This crust is formed from dried body secretions left on the catheter after it slides in and out of your body.
- Rinse your catheter well to wash any remaining soap or cleaning solution.
- Dry your catheter. Lubricate the catheter end that is entering your body with sterile water-soluble lubricant. This will help the catheter slide freely and not irritate your skin.
- You may shower and bathe even with your catheter in place.
- You may even have intercourse with a catheter. Men should fold the catheter back along the penis and put on a condom. Women can tape the catheter to their stomach or inside thigh so it is out of the way.
Problem Solving Tips

Phone the home care nurse or doctor if you have:

- chills
- pain in the side or lower back
- bloody or brown-coloured urine
- cloudy, smelly urine with clumpy pieces
- urine leaking around the catheter
- catheter that falls out
- no urine in the bag for 8 hours or pain over the bladder
- upset stomach and throwing up
- severe headache
- call your doctor if your temperature is above 38.5°C (100°F)

Rash or redness

- If your rash or redness is severe, contact your doctor immediately.
- If you feel your symptoms are mild, keep the red area clean and dry.
- Find out what is causing the irritation. You may have developed an allergy to the catheter or the tubing may be too slack or too tight

What happens when catheter balloon slips out of place?

You may experience bleeding or pain.
- Deflate the balloon using a syringe.
- Remove your catheter
- Immediately contact a health care professional, your doctor, medi-center or emergency room for re-insertion. Make sure that you take your catheter equipment with you.
- If you have been taught the procedure you can put a new catheter in yourself or verbally direct your caregiver.

Catheter blockage

How do I know the catheter is blocked?
- Check that your urine flows easily.
- Urine hasn’t drained for two hours even though you’ve been drinking plenty of fluids.
- Damp underwear that smell of urine, lower abdominal pressure, and the urge to empty bladder.
- Constipation may cause the catheter to not drain well.
How do I unblock the catheter?

- First, straighten any kinked tubing.
- Next, try positioning your body differently. Drainage can stop if the catheter lies against the bladder wall. Changing your position can restart the drainage.
- Try lowering the drainage bag if it won't drain if it's above your bladder.
- Contact your home care nurse or go to the nearest emergency department if catheter remains blocked.
- Remove catheter and put in a new one (if you have been taught how).

Avoiding infections for Indwelling Catheters

Personal daily cleanliness and care of your catheter are important in preventing infections.

- Always wash your hands before handling equipment.
- Replace equipment when needed. Another excellent way to help avoid infections is to drink 8 to 12 glasses of fluids a day (2000 – 3000 mL per day). This amount dilutes your urine, keeps your bladder flushed and reduces sediment and stones from developing. The only time you should not drink this much fluid is when your doctor has mentioned this to you.

If you think you have a bladder infection ask your doctor or homecare nurse what to do. You may be asked to collect a urine sample.

Collecting a urine sample

This is done when your doctor believes you may have a bladder infection.

- The urine sample should be obtained from a new indwelling catheter.
- Make sure you have a sterile bottle.
- Wash your hands with soap and water. Wash the connection and tubing.
- Disconnect your catheter and drain your urine into the sterile bottle.
- Urine samples should only be collected if you have symptoms of urinary tract infection.
- Routine collections are not recommended as not all bacteria need to be treated. This will prevent unnecessary use of antibiotics.
Never use urine in the leg bag
Try to take your sample in immediately. Urine spoils in about 1 hour. If you can’t get in to see your doctor right away, your urine can be stored in the fridge for about 7 hours.

If urine leaks around the catheter
- Usually means that you are having bladder muscle spasms.
- These spasms may be caused by:
  - the spasticity from your spinal cord injury.
  - too large a catheter or balloon.
    You may need a smaller catheter.
  - a bladder infection.
  - may be triggered by a full bowel.
  - pregnancy.
  - drainage bag may be full. Empty bag.
  - connection may be loose between catheter and tubing. Check that it’s tight.
  - catheter may be blocked. If blocked, follow steps for blocked catheter.

If it continues to leak then call your home care nurse or contact your doctor.

Frequency of Drainage Bag Changes
The standard procedure has been to change the drainage bag with each catheter change. If the catheter is changed less than once a month, it is standard to change the drainage bag at least once a month.

Bedside Drainage Bag
The leg bag should remain attached to the catheter at night. The leg bag is removed from your leg and fabric straps can be used to pin the leg bag to the bed to secure it in position. Reposition the bag from one side to the other when turning in bed. If you have large volumes at night you may choose to attach a bedside drainage bag to the bottom of the leg bag at night. Swab the drain tip with alcohol, attach the bedside drainage bag and open the clamp of the leg bag so urine flows through the leg bag into the bedside drainage bag. In the morning close the clamp on the leg bag and disconnect the bedside drainage bag. Empty the bedside drainage bag. Wash it with soap and water rinse and hang to dry.

Capital Health is one of Canada's largest integrated academic health regions, providing complete health services to 860,000 people in Edmonton, St. Albert, Strathcona County and Leduc County, including the City of Leduc and surrounding municipalities. Capital Health serves a total of 1.6 million people across central and northern Alberta, providing specialized services such as trauma and burn treatment, organ transplants, and high-risk obstetrics.