Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# About Your Urinary (Foley) Catheter: How To Clean and Care for It

This information will help you care for your urinary (Foley) catheter.

## About your urinary (Foley) catheter

Your Foley catheter is a thin, flexible tube placed through your urethra (the small tube that carries urine from your bladder to outside your body) and into your bladder. Your Foley catheter drains your urine (pee). It's held inside your bladder by a balloon filled with water.

### How your Foley catheter works

Your urine goes from your bladder and through a drainage tube into a drainage collection bag. The drainage bag stays on your leg with a special tape called Cath-Secure®.

You will have 2 types of drainage bags:

- **A leg bag.** This is the bag that you wear during the day. It holds half a liter of urine.
- **A night bag.** This is the bag you will put on at night before you go to bed. It holds 2 liters of urine.

The parts of the catheter that are outside your body are shown in Figure 1.

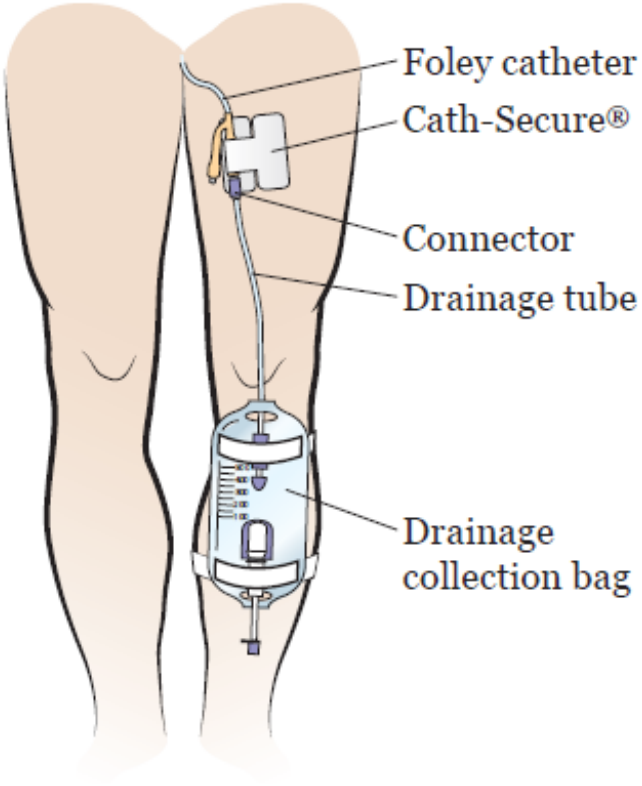



Figure 1. The parts of your Foley catheter and drainage bag

# How to take care of your Foley catheter

To take care of your Foley catheter, you will need to:

- Clean your catheter every day.
- Change your drainage bags. You will change your drainage bag 2 times a day:
  - In the morning, change the night bag to the leg bag.
  - At night before you go to bed, change the leg bag to the night bag.
- Replace your drainage bags with new bags once a week. You should also change your drainage bag if it gets clogged or blocked.
- Wash your drainage bags every day.
- Drink 1 to 2 glasses of liquids every 2 hours while you're awake to keep you hydrated.

You may see some blood or urine around where the catheter enters your body.

This may happen when you're walking or having a bowel movement (pooping). This is normal if there's urine draining into the drainage bag. **If you do not have urine draining into the drainage bag, call your healthcare provider.**

# How to comfortably wear your Foley catheter and leg bag

- The tubing from your leg bag should fit down to your calf with your leg slightly bent. If you have extra tubing, you may need to cut it. Your healthcare provider will show you how to do this.
- Always wear the leg bag below your knee. This will help it drain.
- Place the leg bag on your calf using the Velcro® straps your healthcare provider gave you. Use a leg strap to secure the tubing to your thigh.
- If the straps leave a mark on your leg, they are too tight. Loosen them. Leaving the straps too tight can lower your blood flow and cause blood clots.
- Use a water-based lubricant (such as Astroglide® or K-Y®) to keep your penis or vagina opening from getting sore.
- Keep your penis or vagina opening clean by taking a shower every day. This will help prevent infections when your Foley catheter is in place.

# How to shower with your Foley catheter

- You can shower while you have your catheter in place.
- Do not take a bath until your catheter is removed. Taking a bath while you have your catheter in place puts you at risk for infections.
- Make sure you always shower with your night bag. Your night bag is waterproof. Do not shower with your leg bag. Your leg bag has cloth on the side and will not dry as fast.
    - You may find it easier to shower in the morning before you change your night bag to your leg bag.

# How to clean your Foley catheter

You can clean your catheter while you're in the shower. Follow these instructions.

1. Gather your supplies. You will need:
    - Mild soap, such as Dove®.
    - 1 Cath-Secure®.
2. Clean your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
    - If you're washing your hands with soap and water, wet your hands and apply soap. Rub your hands together well for at least 20 seconds, then rinse. Dry your hands with a paper towel. Use that same towel to turn off the faucet.
    - If you're using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, cover your hands with it. Rub them together until they're dry.
3. Using mild soap and water, clean your penis or vagina.
    - If you have a penis, pull back your foreskin (the skin around the tip of your penis), if needed. Clean the area, including your penis.
    - If you have a vagina, separate your labia (the smaller folds of skin around your vaginal opening). Clean the area from front to back.
4. Clean the area where the catheter enters your body. This is called your urethra.
5. Clean the catheter from where it enters your body and then down, away from your body. Hold the catheter at the point it enters your body so that you do not put tension on it.
6. Rinse the area well and dry it gently.
7. If you removed your old Cath-Secure, attach the catheter to your leg with a new Cath-Secure. This will keep the catheter from moving.

# When to change your drainage bags

You will change your drainage bag 2 times a day. Change it:

- In the morning after you shower, change the night bag to the leg bag.
- At night before you go to bed, change the leg bag to the night bag.

Replace your drainage bags with new bags once a week. You should also change your drainage bag if it gets clogged or blocked.

# How to change your drainage bag

Please visit www.mskcc.org/pe/change-foley-drainage-bag to watch this video.

1. Gather your supplies. You will need:
   - A clean cloth (not one you're using for bathing) or a 4 x 4 piece of gauze.
   - Your night or leg bag (whichever one you are switching to).
   - 2 alcohol pads.
2. Clean your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
   - If you're washing your hands with soap and water, wet your hands and apply soap. Rub your hands together well for at least 20 seconds, then rinse. Dry your hands with a paper towel. Use that same towel to turn off the faucet.
   - If you're using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, cover your hands with it. Rub them together until they're dry.
3. Empty the urine from the drainage bag into the toilet. Make sure the spout of the drainage bag never touches the side of the toilet or any emptying container. If it does, wipe it with an alcohol pad for 15 seconds.
4. Place the clean cloth or gauze under the connector to catch any leakage.
5. Pinch the catheter with your fingers and disconnect the used bag.

6. Wipe the end of the catheter with an alcohol pad.
7. Wipe the connector on the new bag with the second alcohol pad.
8. Connect the clean bag to the catheter and release your finger pinch. Make sure the catheter is tightly connected to the bag to keep it from opening or leaking.
9. Check all connections. Straighten any kinks or twists in the tubing.

# How to take care of your drainage bags

## Caring for your leg drainage bag

- Empty the leg bag into the toilet every 2 to 4 hours, as needed. You can do this through the spout at the bottom of the bag. Do not let the bag get completely full.
- Do not lie down for longer than 2 hours while you're wearing the leg bag. This can keep your urine from draining the way it should.

## Caring for your night drainage bag

- Always keep the night bag below the level of your bladder.
- When you go to sleep, hang your night bag off the bed. You can do this by using a small trash can. Place a clean plastic bag inside the trash can. Hang your night bag inside of the trash can.

## Cleaning your drainage bags

Clean your leg bag and night bag every day. Follow these instructions.

1. Gather your supplies. You will need:
    - White vinegar.
    - Cool water.
2. Clean your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
    - If you're washing your hands with soap and water, wet your hands and apply soap. Rub your hands together well for at least 20 seconds, then

rinse. Dry your hands with a paper towel. Use that same towel to turn off the faucet.

- If you're using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, cover your hands with it. Rub them together until they're dry.

3. Rinse the bag with cool water. Do not use hot water because it can damage the plastic.
4. To help get rid of the smell, fill the bag halfway with a mixture of 1part white vinegar and 3 parts water. Shake the bag and let it sit for 15 minutes.
    - If you cannot get the mixture into the bag, try putting the vinegar and water into a measuring cup with a pour spout. Then use the spout to help pour the mixture into the bag.
5. Rinse the bag with cool water. Hang it up to dry.

# How to prevent Foley catheter infections

Follow these guidelines to prevent getting infections while you have your catheter in place:

- Keep the drainage bag below the level of your bladder.
- Always keep your drainage bag off the floor.
- Keep the catheter secured to your thigh to keep it from moving.
- Do not lie on your catheter or block the flow of urine in the tubing.
- Take a shower every day to keep the catheter clean.
- Wash your hands before and after touching the catheter or bag.

# Common questions about caring for your Foley catheter

## Can I place a Foley catheter myself?

No. Your catheter is placed by your healthcare provider.

## How long can I wear my Foley catheter before it needs to be changed?

Your catheter should be replaced about once a month, if it stops working, or if you have an infection.

## Can I poop when I have a Foley catheter?

Yes. Your catheter will not affect your pooping.

## Can I get an erection with a Foley catheter?

Yes. You can get an erection with a catheter in place.

## Can I drive with a Foley catheter?

You can drive with a catheter unless your healthcare provider gives you other instructions.

## Can I exercise with a Foley catheter?

Ask your healthcare provider if you can exercise while you have a Foley catheter in place.

## Can I swim with a Foley catheter?

No. You cannot swim with a catheter in place.

## Can I fly on an airplane with a Foley catheter?

Yes. You can fly on an airplane with a catheter.

# When to call your healthcare provider

Call your healthcare provider right away if:

- Your catheter comes out. Do not try to put it back in yourself.
- You have a fever of 101°F (38.3 °C) or higher.

- You're making less urine than usual.
- You do not have urine draining into your drainage bag.
- Your urine smells bad.
- You have bright red blood or large blood clots in your urine.
- You have abdominal (belly) pain and no urine in your catheter bag.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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