Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

How To Irrigate Your Urinary (Foley) Catheter

This information explains how to irrigate (wash out or flush) your urinary catheter.

About irrigating your urinary catheter

Depending on the surgery you had, clots can clog your urinary catheter. You may need to irrigate your catheter at home. Irrigating the catheter can help keep it from getting clogged. It will help your urine (pee) flow down the tube attached to the catheter into the drainage bag.

Your nurse will show you how to irrigate your catheter. They'll also give you the supplies you need.

Do not irrigate your catheter unless your care team tells you to do so.

When to irrigate your urinary catheter

Your care team will tell you how often to irrigate your catheter. Most people need to irrigate their catheter 2 to 4 times a day.

You may also need to irrigate it when needed. This can happen when your urine looks pink or red.

Contact your care team if:

- Urine looks dark and bloody.
- Many clots of blood are draining into drainage bag.
- You feel pain or pressure in your abdomen (belly) or pelvis.

- Little or no urine is draining into the bag.
    - Check for any kinks or twists in the catheter and drainage bag tubing. They may be blocking the flow of urine.

How to irrigate your Foley catheter

If your drainage bag has any urine, empty it into the toilet before you start. Make sure the drainage bag spout never touches the side of the toilet or the container you're emptying into; If it does, wipe it with an alcohol pad for 15 seconds.

1. 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 for at least 20 seconds, then rinse. Dry your hands with a paper towel and use that same towel to turn off the faucet.
- If you're using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, be sure to cover your hands with it. Then, rub your hands together until they're dry.

2. Gather your supplies on a clean surface. We recommend using a portable table, such as a TV dinner table. You'll need:

- 1 (60 mL/cc) piston syringe
- Container
- Irrigation tray
- 3 alcohol pads
- 1 bottle of normal saline (500ml or 1 liter)
- 1 sterile 4"x4" gauze pad
- A small trash can

3. Sit in a chair in a comfortable, upright position.
4. Place the piston syringe nearby on the clean surface.
5. Open the bottle of normal saline. Pour about 100ml of normal saline into the

container that comes with the packaging.

6. Your care team will tell you how much normal saline to pull up onto the syringe. Most people use 30 to 50 ml. Place the tip of the syringe in the container. Pull back the plunger to pull amount of the saline you were told into the syringe.
7. Put the syringe on the clean surface.
8. Open the gauze pad. Place it nearby on the clean surface.
9. Pinch the catheter above where the drainage bag goes into the catheter with your fingers. Disconnect your foley catheter from the drainage bag. Twist them in opposite directions and pull them apart carefully. Place the tip of the drainage bag on the gauze pad.
10. Wipe the end of your catheter with an alcohol pad. Then, throw away the alcohol pad.
11. Push the end of the syringe into the end of the catheter. Very gently, push down on the plunger to push the saline into your catheter. This is called flushing.

- If you cannot gently flush saline into the catheter, do not force it. Continue to step 12 to attach the catheter to the drainage bag.

12. With the syringe still connected to your catheter, pull the plunger back to pull the liquid into the syringe. This is called aspirating.

- Gently pull back on the syringe to aspirate or pull liquid back into the syringe. If you cannot, do not force it.. Continue to step 12 to attach the catheter to the drainage bag. After attaching the catheter to drainage bag, get up and walk around. Look at the drainage bag to see if urine is flowing.

13. Take the syringe out of your catheter. Place it nearby. Wipe the end of your catheter with a second alcohol pad. Then, throw away the alcohol pad.
14. Wipe the tip of the drainage bag with the third alcohol pad. Then, throw away the alcohol pad.
15. Attach the drainage bag to your catheter. Push the tip of drainage bag into

the catheter. Do not use force.

16. Empty fluid in the syringe into the toilet to get rid of it.
17. You can reuse the same syringe for your next irrigation. Clean the syringe well after using it. To clean it, pull the plunger out of the barrel (the hollow part that held the liquid). Wash the plunger and barrel with warm water and soap. Let them air dry on a clean surface.
18. Clean your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Urine should flow into the drainage bag after you attach the catheter to the drainage bag. If not, contact your care team.

Caring for yourself at home

- Drink 8 to 10 (8-ounce) cups (2 liters) of liquids per day. This helps keep you hydrated and lowers the chance of the catheter getting clogged.
- Limit liquids with caffeine, such as coffee and soda. Too much caffeine can cause dehydration (not having enough liquid).
- Do not drink any alcohol while you have your catheter. Drinking alcohol can slow down healing and raise the chance of bleeding.
- Get up to walk at least 3 times a day. Aim to walk the same amount or more than you did in the hospital.

To learn more about caring for your urinary catheter, read *Caring for Your Urinary (Foley) Catheter*. You can find it online or ask a member of your care team for a copy.

When to call your healthcare provider

Call your healthcare provider if you:

- See small pieces that look like grains of sand in your drainage bag.
- Cannot flush the catheter.
- Do not see urine flowing into drainage bag after irrigating the catheter.
- Feel pressure, pain, or bloating in your lower abdomen (belly) after

irrigating.

- Have a fever over 100.4° F (38.0° C).
- Have urine that smells very bad.
- Have nausea (feel like throwing up)
- Have vomiting (throwing up).
- Have problems that you cannot explain.
- Have any questions or concerns.

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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