Self-catheterisation in female patients: Frequently asked questions

What is self-catheterisation?
Self-catheterisation means that you insert a small, flexible plastic tube into the bladder. The urine flows out through this tube which is then removed and washed. By emptying the bladder regularly in this way, you will prevent a build-up of stagnant urine and should feel more comfortable. You will also be keeping the kidneys and bladder healthy by preventing urinary infections. Some people find that they have less difficulty preventing themselves becoming wet using this technique.

What equipment do I need?
- A catheter – supplied at first by the outpatient clinic and then available to order on prescription from your GP
- Baby wipes
- Shaving mirror and a good light are helpful, particularly at first
- A bottle, dish or plastic box to catch the urine

How do I do it?
- Sit on a towel with a plastic sheet just underneath or lie on the bed if you prefer
- Remove your pants and tuck other clothing out of the way
- Wash your hands thoroughly
- Lie on your back, comfortably propped up with your knees wide apart. Using the light and mirror to help you, find the opening of the urethra which is in front of the vagina and behind the clitoris
- If it is difficult to see the hole, draw the labia forwards and upwards whilst separating them with your fingers. It is also possible to feel the urethra which is like a small pit on a sensitive mound
- Clean inside the labia from front to back using baby wipes
Hold the catheter two inches from its tip and insert it until urine flows (usually needs insertion for two to three inches)

If no urine comes out, the catheter is probably in the vagina. This will do no harm and simply means taking it out and looking again for the urethra, just further forwards

When urine stops flowing, insert the catheter a little further and turn it gently to obtain any remaining urine

Withdraw the catheter slowly

Rinse the catheter under running water, dry on a clean tissue and store in a clean plastic bag open to the air if possible

Personal information
Use the catheter ……… times a day
Use a new plastic bag every day
Discard the catheter and use a new catheter for each catheterisation (catheters are single-use and are not re-usable)

Catheter information
Catheter recommended……………………….. (female)
Size ……..FG

Other information
This patient information leaflet provides input from specialists, the British Association of Urological Surgeons, the Department of Health and evidence based sources as a supplement to any advice you may already have been given by your GP. Alternative treatments can be discussed in more detail with your urologist or specialist nurse.

Who can I contact for more help or information?

Oncology nurses
Uro-oncology nurse specialist
01223 586748

Bladder cancer nurse practitioner (haematuria, chemotherapy and BCG)
01223 274608

Prostate cancer nurse practitioner
01223 274608 or 216897 or bleep 154-548

Surgical care practitioner
01223 348590 or 256157 or bleep 154-351

Non-oncology nurses
Urology nurse practitioner (incontinence, urodynamics, catheter patients)
01223 274608 or 586748 or bleep 157-237
Urology nurse practitioner (stoma care)
01223 349800

Urology nurse practitioner (stone disease)
01223 349800 or bleep 152-879

Patient Advice and Liaison Centre (PALS)
Telephone: +44 (0)1223
PatientLine: *801 (from patient bedside telephones only)
E mail: pals@addenbrookes.nhs.uk
Mail: PALS, Box No 53
Addenbrooke’s Hospital
Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 2QQ

Chaplaincy and multi faith community
Telephone: +44 (0)1223 217769
E mail: chaplaincy@addenbrookes.nhs.uk
Mail: The Chaplaincy, Box No 105
Addenbrooke’s Hospital
Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 2QQ

MINICOM System ("type" system for the hard of hearing)
Telephone: +44 (0)1223 217589

Access office (travel, parking and security information)
Telephone: +44 (0)1223 596060

We are a smoke-free site: smoking will not be allowed anywhere on the hospital site. For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169.

Other formats:
If you would like this information in another language or audio, please contact Interpreting services on telephone: 01223 348043, or email: interpreting@addenbrookes.nhs.uk For Large Print information please contact the patient information team: patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

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