

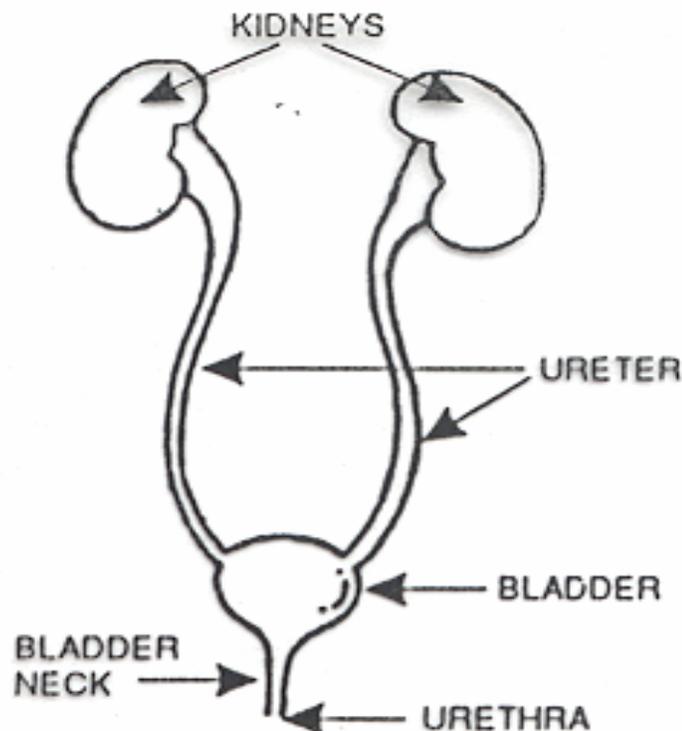
*MANAGING YOUR  
URETHRAL CATHETER  
AT HOME  
PATIENT INFORMATION*

This booklet has been designed to help you learn how to manage your catheter when you are at home. Feel free to discuss any issues and questions you may have with the medical and nursing staff looking after you.

## *What is the Bladder?*

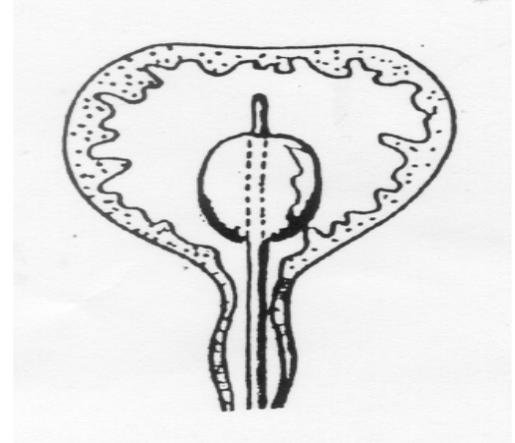
The bladder is a hollow, muscular organ in the pelvis behind the pubic bone.

The function of the bladder is to collect, store and expel urine as the kidneys produce it. When the bladder is full, the nerves that supply it send a message to the brain that you need to pass urine. Then, under your control, the outlet pipe (urethra) muscles relax and the bladder contracts until it is empty of urine.



## *What is a Urethral Catheter?*

A urethral catheter is a tube that is inserted into the bladder via the urethra to allow urine to drain. It is held in place by a balloon filled with water that rests at the base of the bladder.



The catheter connects to a drainage bag with a tap at the bottom which enables the bag to be emptied.

## *Why is a Catheter Necessary?*

Some of the reasons why a urethral catheter may be needed are listed below:

- Inability to pass urine
- To allow the urinary system to heal after certain surgery
- For the management of urinary incontinence

## *How long will I have the Catheter?*

This will depend on why it was inserted. Your doctor will discuss this with you.

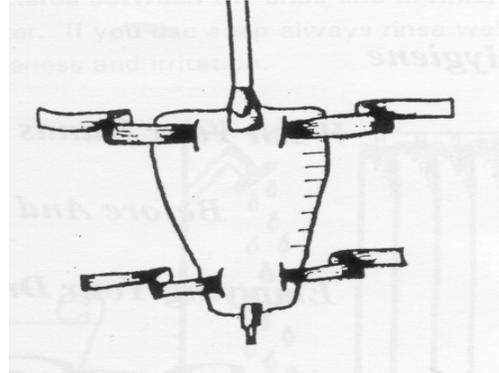
## *Who is Available to Help?*

Your District Nurse and GP (family doctor) will help you to manage your catheter at home. Your District Nurse will visit you at home and give you practical help and advice as well as a supply of drainage bags.

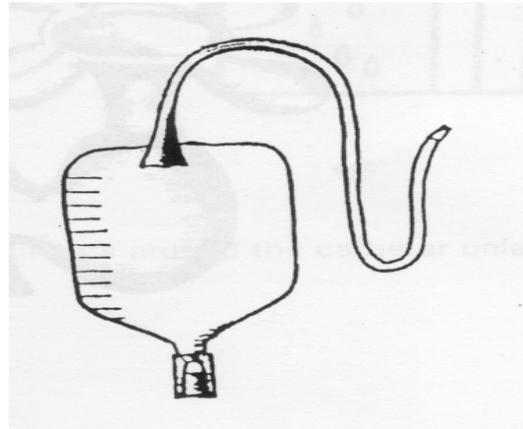
# *Drainage Bags*

There are two types of drainage bags:

- Leg-bag (day-bag)



- Night-bag (large capacity)



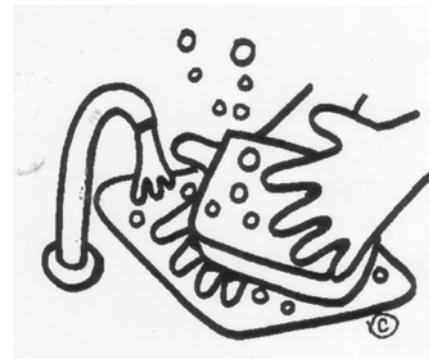
## *Caring for your Catheter at Home*

The following are guidelines for caring for your catheter at home:

### **Hygiene**

You should always wash your hands thoroughly before and after:

- Emptying the drainage bag
- Changing the drainage bag
- Any time when the catheter is handled

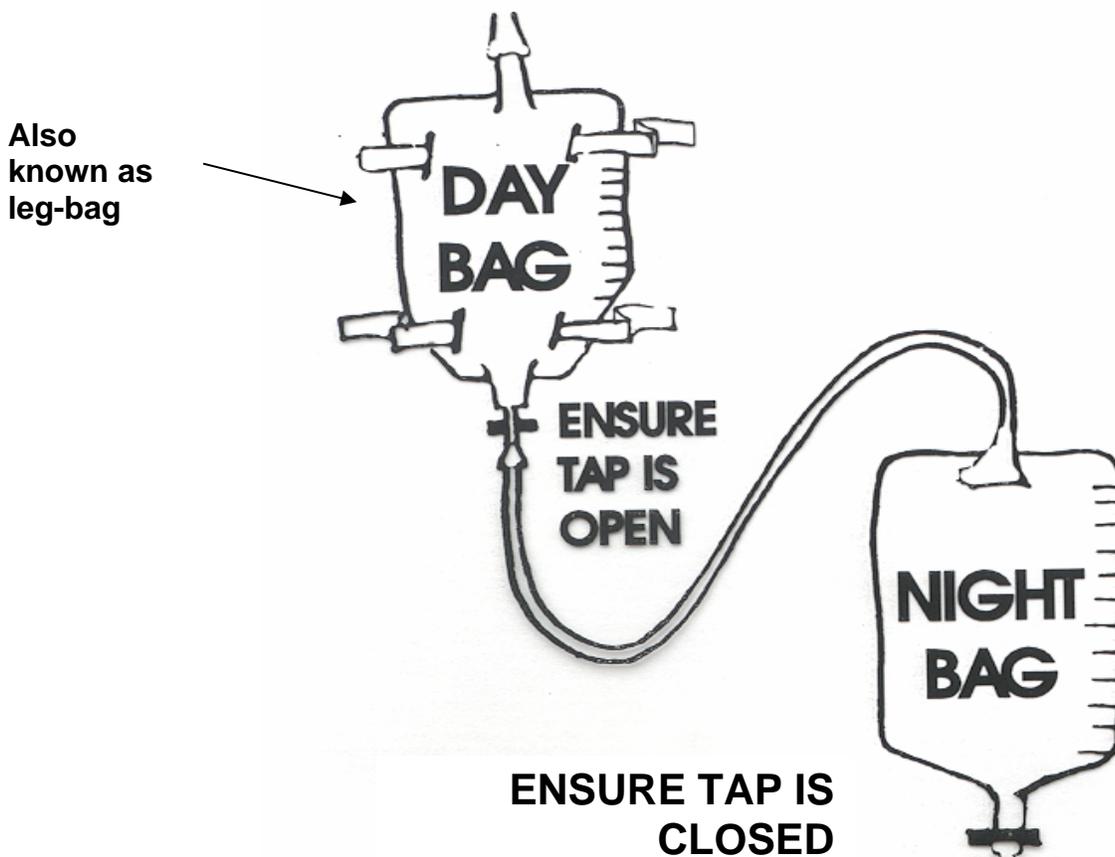


## General care

- Shower regularly – daily if possible.
- When washing, make sure you clean the skin around the catheter and the perineum (area between the urethra and the anus) thoroughly with warm water.
- If you use soap, always rinse well or the soap may cause soreness and irritation.
- Do not use creams, powders or ointments around the catheter unless your doctor has prescribed them.

## Overnight Drainage

If you are using a leg-bag during the day, you will need to connect a larger drainage bag (night-bag) for nighttime. The night-bag tubing connects at the tap of the day-bag. Your nurse will show you how to do this.



As the night-bag tubing is longer, it is important to check that there aren't any kinks in it or urine will be unable to drain.

The night-bag should be placed LOWER than your bed. The bag may be placed flat on the floor or attached to the side of the bed. You may prefer to place the night-bag in a bucket or on a plastic sheet or towel in case of leakage.

## *Cleaning the Night-bag*

When you disconnect the night-bag it will need to be emptied, cleaned and stored in a dry place. For cleaning you will need a bowl (or sink) containing warm water and detergent eg. washing-up liquid.

### **How to wash the night-bag:**

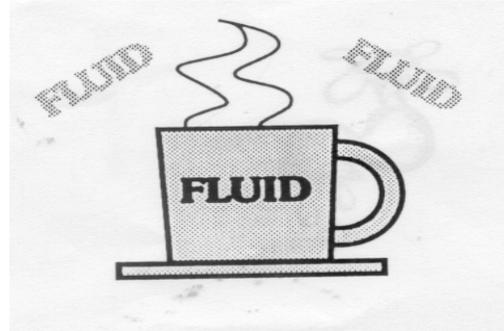
- Empty the urine from the night-bag down the toilet.
- Wash the inside and outside of the drainage bag with the warm, soapy water and then rinse with warm water to clear the soap.
- After rinsing, shake off excess water and dry the outside of the night-bag with a clean towel or disposable paper towel. Recap the end of the tubing. Store the clean night-bag in a clean and dry place (eg. ice-cream container with a lid). Do not leave the night-bag soaking in a solution as this will damage the bag.

### **How long does a drainage bag last?**

Your District Nurse will supply you with bags. Drainage bags only need to be changed if they leak, become discoloured, or smell.

# Promoting Drainage

Unless your doctor has told you otherwise, you are advised to drink approximately 2 litres of fluid a day. This is equal to 8-10 cups. Your urine should be a light yellow colour.



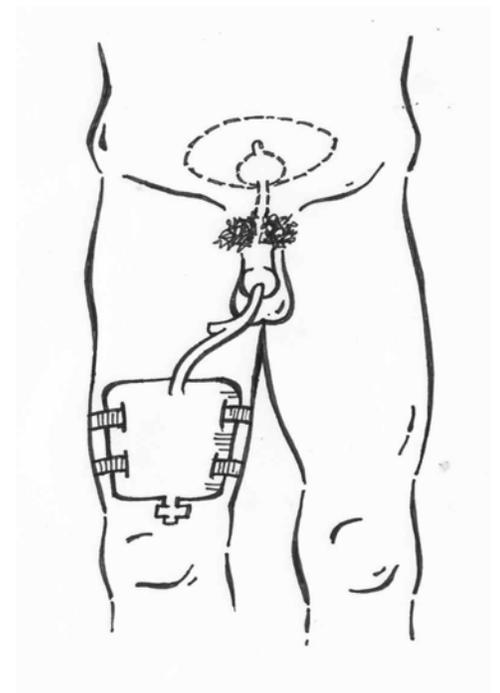
Drinking plenty of fluids will help the catheter to drain, lessen the risk of infection and the blockage of the catheter by debris.

As well as drinking plenty, it is important to check that the drainage tubing is not kinked as this will prevent urine draining from the bladder. This is especially important if you are using a night-bag for overnight drainage as this longer tubing can become kinked more easily.

Keep the drainage bag lower than the bladder. If the drainage bag is raised higher than your bladder, urine will be unable to drain 'downhill' into the bag.

## **You can ensure the bag is low enough by:**

- Wearing a leg-bag during the day.
- Attaching the leg-bag with straps above and below the knee.
- Placing the night-bag so that it is lower than your bed.



## *Prevent 'Pulling' on the Catheter*

Traction or 'pulling' on the catheter may cause discomfort and injury to the bladder and urethra.

You can prevent pulling by following the advice described below:

- Wear a leg-bag during the day. This will prevent you from treading on the tubing.
- Strap your leg-bag comfortably to your leg or wear a pouch or pocket with a waist belt to support the bag.
- Empty the drainage bag regularly – it will become heavy when it is full.

**DO NOT LET THE DRAINAGE BAG DRAG ON THE FLOOR**

## *What if the Catheter Leaks?*

Leakage of urine is usually due to spasms of the bladder muscles. These occur because the catheter irritates the bladder. They can also occur if the catheter is not draining properly.

A bladder spasm may cause urine to pass along the outside of the catheter in small or large amounts. There may be discomfort associated with an urge to pass urine. It may be possible to relieve the bladder spasms with medication.

If you do experience leakage, check the following:

- Is the catheter or tubing kinked?
- Is the drainage bag too high (ie. above the level of your bladder)?
- Is the drainage bag connected securely to the catheter?

If the drainage system is all right and the amount of leakage is small or occasional, report it to your District Nurse when you are next visited or telephoned.

If leakage is ongoing, painful, large in amount, or your catheter is not draining, contact your District Nurse or GP (family doctor) **PROMPTLY!** Your catheter may be blocked and may need to be flushed with salt water to clear the blockage (irrigated) or replaced.

## *Recognising Infection*

Sometimes people with catheter get urine infections. This is because the catheter allows bacteria (germs) to get into the bladder more easily.

### **You can reduce the risk of infection by:**

- Drinking plenty of fluid
- Thorough handwashing before and after touching the drainage tube or bag
- Cleaning the over-night drainage bags as instructed

### **Signs of infection to watch out for:**

- Do you feel unwell – tired, loss of appetite, vomiting?
- Do you have a fever, “shivering”, or chills?
- Do you have pain over the kidney or bladder?
- Do you have pain or aching in your back?
- Is your urine cloudy or does it have a bad smell?
- Is there blood in your urine?

If you have some or all of these signs and symptoms, contact your GP IMMEDIATELY as they indicate that you may have a urinary tract infection.

At times you may notice some debris or floating particles in your urine. This is usually due to crystals or salts in the urine – you should drink more fluid.

## *Supplies*

When you are discharged from hospital your hospital nurse will provide you with a spare day-bag and night-bag.

When you go away on holiday, please remember to let your District Nurse know and arrange to take any supplies you may need with you.

3 References: Mosby's Genitourinary Disorders, Clinical Nursing, Mikel Gray 1992  
Urological Nursing 3rd Edition, Urological Nursing' 2004  
Campbell's Urology 7th Edition, Urology, 1998