Let's Talk About...

Central line catheter emergencies

There are some common central venous catheter emergencies. This handout will help you take care of these emergencies. You or your child should always have a clamp close by in case you have a catheter emergency. You can get one from your nurse at the hospital. Make sure you always have a "Go Bag" with you. It has the supplies you need for catheter emergencies.

What do I do if a hole appears in the catheter or the catheter breaks apart?

1. Immediately clamp the catheter somewhere between the hole and your child. If you cannot find your clamp quickly, kink the line with your fingers.
2. If you have a sterile gauze pad nearby, put this around the exposed end of the catheter. This might help stop germs from getting into the catheter.
3. Call your home care company and tell the situation to the nurse on call. Ask for a nursing care visit to repair the catheter right away or go right to the Emergency Department.
4. Tell your health care provider.
5. If the homecare company cannot repair the catheter, go to the Emergency Department.

What do I do if the catheter is pulled out?

1. Put direct pressure on the place where the catheter came out of your child's skin. Use your hand and a gauze pad or clean towel and put pressure on it for five minutes.
2. When the bleeding stops:
   - Tell your child's doctor.
   - For the site where the catheter came out:
     - Clean with a Chloraprep® or Betadine® swab.
     - Put on an antibiotic ointment.
     - Put a sterile dressing over it until your child can see a doctor.
3. If the bleeding does not stop within five minutes, go to the Emergency Department or call 911. Keep putting direct pressure on the site where the catheter came out.

What do I do if the catheter will not flush?

1. Make sure the catheter is not clamped or kinked. Take off clamps and untangle kinks.
2. If you cannot see any kinks, take off the dressing and look for kinks or twists underneath the dressing.
3. Change the dressing if you have been trained to do this.
4. Change the caps, if you have been trained to do this.
5. If you have tried all the above and you still cannot withdraw fluid and flush the catheter, call your child's home care company right away.

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