

Let's Talk ABOUT...

Spina bifida and self-catherization

Children with spina bifida have problems with urine and bowel control. This varies from child to child and is due to the injury to the spine. To develop urinary control, children should learn self-catheterization (most often called self-cath or cathing). In self-catheterization, the child places a small tube in their bladder through the urethra (where the urine comes out of the body). This skill lets the child cath only when needed and little by little move away from it.

How do I know if my child can do self-catheterization?

To see if your child is ready for cathing, an occupational therapist (OT) will test your child on some skills. These skills include:

- **Hand skills.** The OT may ask your child to string beads, put pennies in a bank, and push a straw through a lid.
- **Vision.** Your child will need to show where to put a catheter.
- **Touch.** The OT may ask your child to point out different textures.
- **Able to follow directions in order.** Your child should be able to put cards in the right order or explain how to cath.
- **Cathing from different positions.** Your child will need to show that he can self-cath while lying down, sitting, and standing.

The therapist will also teach your child to sit up and cath on the toilet or from the wheelchair.

What supplies does my child need?

Your child may need a toilet safety frame, reducer ring, or potty-chair for self-catheterization. The reducer ring makes the size of the toilet opening smaller and gives a soft support surface to hold the pelvis stable. The safety frame is made of two handrails that fit around the toilet. It gives a handhold to balance with one hand while cathing with the other hand. A wheelchair specialist can provide the reducer ring and toilet safety frame, but you will need a prescription from your child's doctor.

For a younger child, you can use a commercial potty chair for support. This is low-cost and available in any discount store.

Some insurance companies may cover the supplies you get with a prescription.