

Let's Talk About...

Spina Bifida and Self-Catheterization

Because of the injury to the spine, children with spina bifida have varying degrees of urinary and bowel control. To develop urinary control, children should learn to self-catheterize (usually called self-cath or cathing). This skill allows them to use cathing only when they need it and to gradually move away from using it.

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

To see if your child is ready for cathing, an occupational therapist will test your child on several skills. These skills include the following:

- **Fine motor.** Your child may be asked to string beads, put pennies in a bank, and push a straw through a lid.
- **Visual.** Your child will need to demonstrate where to place a catheter (commonly called "cathing").
- **Touch.** Your child will be asked to identify different textures.
- **Ability to follow directions in order.** Your child should be able to arrange a series of cards in the right sequence or explain how to complete cathing.

- **Cathing from different positions.** Your child will need to demonstrate self-cathing from a lying down, sitting, and standing position.

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

What type of equipment does my child need?

Your child may need a toilet safety frame, reducer ring, and/or potty-chair for self-catheterization. The reducer ring reduces the size of the toilet opening and provides a soft supportive surface to stabilize the pelvis. The safety frame consists of two handrails that fit around the toilet. It provides a handhold for balancing 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.

For younger children, a commercial potty chair can be used for support. This equipment is inexpensive and readily available in any discount store.

Some insurance companies may cover the prescribed equipment.



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