

Foley Catheter: Home instructions

What is a Foley catheter?

A Foley catheter (also called an “indwelling catheter”) is a thin, flexible tube inserted through your **urethra** [yu-RHEE-thruh] and into your bladder (see illustration at right). It is used to drain urine (pee) out of your body and into a collection bag.

Other methods of draining urine include **external catheters** in men, which are placed over the penis rather than inside it, and **temporary catheters**, which are removed right after draining urine.

Why do I need a catheter?

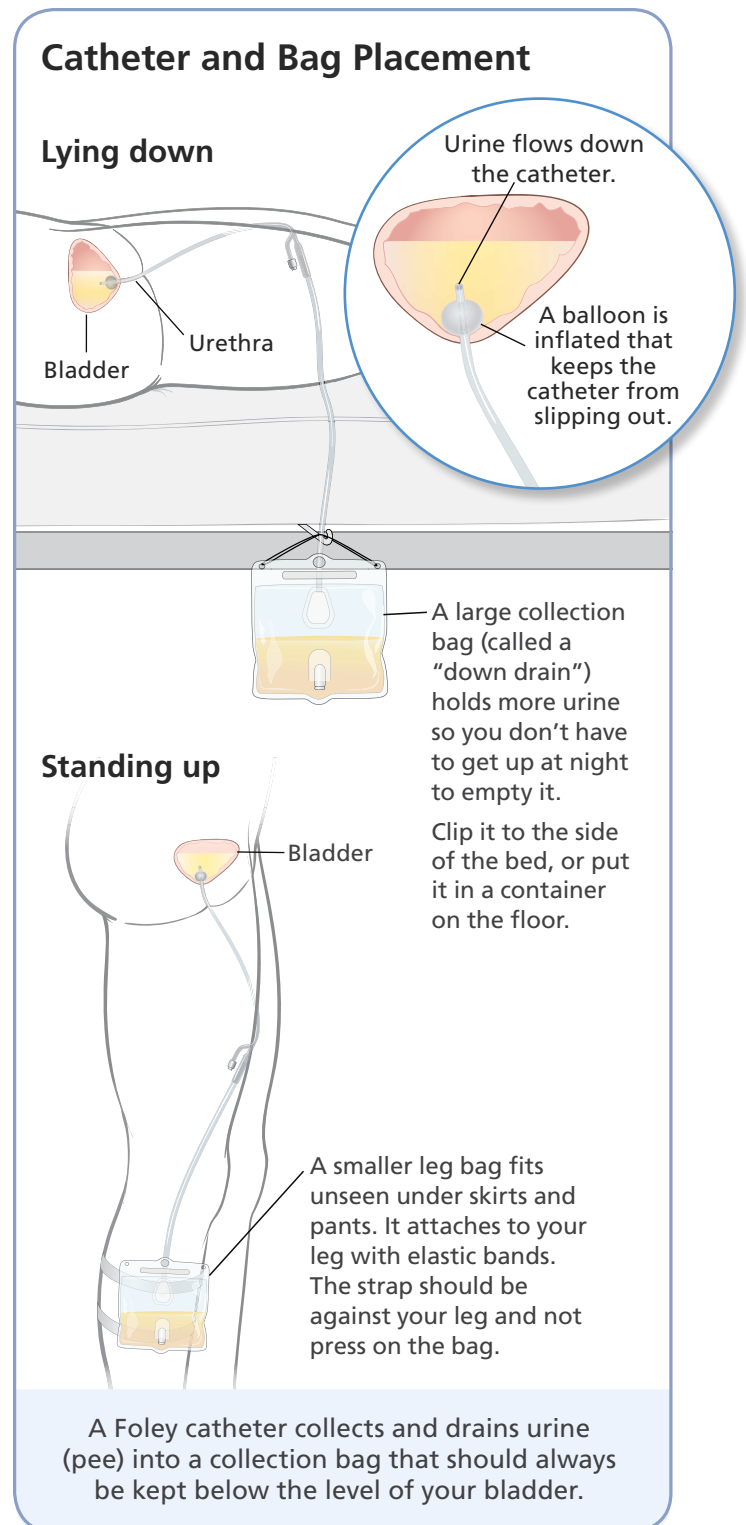
You may need a Foley catheter if you can’t control the flow of urine or can’t urinate by yourself. This may happen if you have an infection, a swollen prostate gland, a reaction to a medicine, a disease or injury, or a recent surgery. You may also need a Foley catheter if your healthcare providers want to keep track of how much urine you’re passing.

How long you need to wear a catheter depends on what type of illness or procedure you’ve had. Your healthcare providers can tell you what to expect and will remove it as soon as possible. Ask them to check often to make sure you still need it.

If you need to keep wearing a catheter after going home from the hospital, review “**Catheter Basics**” (see [pages 3 to 4](#)).

How is a catheter placed?

You will be given a catheter only when necessary, and it will be removed as soon as possible. The skin around the area of insertion will be thoroughly cleaned. The catheter will be inserted into the bladder by someone specially trained to do so without introducing germs into your body. Once inserted, a small balloon is inflated to keep the catheter in place.



Will the catheter be uncomfortable?

If a catheter is inserted before you leave surgery, when you're still asleep, you won't be able to feel it being placed. If it is inserted when you're awake, the insertion may feel uncomfortable.

While you're wearing a catheter, you may feel as if your bladder is full and you need to urinate. You also may feel some discomfort when you turn over if your catheter tube gets pulled. These are normal problems that usually don't require attention. But if you feel burning, itching, or sharp pain, be sure to tell your healthcare providers.

When should I call my doctor?

Contact your healthcare provider right away (even if not during business hours) if:

- **You can't get your catheter to drain into the bag** (very little urine has drained into the bag for 6 to 8 hours, or your bladder feels full).
- **Your catheter is leaking**, or urine is leaking from the insertion site. Your catheter may be blocked and need attention.
- **You have pain, swelling, or pus** draining where the catheter enters your body.
- **You have new pain** in your abdomen (belly), pelvis, legs, or back, or you have a burning sensation in your bladder.
- **Your temperature is over 101°F (38.3°C).**
- **You have nausea, vomiting, or chills.**

Contact your healthcare provider during regular business hours if:

- **Your catheter comes out.** If this happens, place a towel or waterproof pad underneath you to protect the bed or chair. Don't try to put the catheter back in yourself.
- **You have other problems or concerns** that may be related to your catheter.
- **Your urine has changed color**, is red or pink (from blood), or is thick or cloudy.
- **Your urine has an unusually bad odor.**

Questions for my doctor

Catheter basics

One of your most important concerns is to keep yourself and your catheter free from germs that could cause infection. When you have a catheter, you can get a **urinary tract infection (UTI)** easily. Follow the instructions below and on the following pages to help prevent infection.

- **Always wash your hands** before and after handling your catheter.
- **Shower regularly**, but don't sit down in the bathtub with a catheter.
- **Wear cotton underwear.** It keeps your skin drier.
- **Drink extra fluids** if your doctor says to. Extra fluids will keep urine flowing through your catheter and help prevent complications.
- **Check for signs of infection**, such as pain, swelling. Signs of infection could also include pain in the abdomen, pelvis, legs, back, or bladder. Call your healthcare provider if you have these symptoms.

Handling the bag and tube

Be careful to not introduce germs into the catheter and to make sure the urine can flow steadily into the bag.

- **Keep the bag below the level of your bladder.** This will keep urine from flowing back into your bladder and causing an infection.
- **Arrange the tubing so it doesn't kink or loop.** Urine needs to be able to flow freely into the bag.
- **Don't let the bag rest directly on the floor.** Keep all tubing parts and bag away from germs.
- **Don't puncture or cut the tube.** There should be no holes or breaks anywhere in the tube or bag.
- **Don't pull on the catheter** or try to remove it.

What if I have problems?

If your catheter is not draining:

- Check to see if the tubing is twisted or kinked.
- Make sure the bag is below the level of your bladder.
- Make sure you're not lying on the tubing or that it's not pressed between your thighs.
- Check to see if the tubing is clogged with blood or sediment.

Cleaning your catheter

Clean your catheter and the skin around it every day, especially following each time you have a bowel movement (poop). Follow these steps:

- **Gather your supplies.** You will need a bowl of warm water, soap, a clean washcloth, and a waterproof pad or a towel to protect the area around you.
- **Wash your hands with soap and water.**
- **Place the towel or pad underneath you.**
- **Clean the catheter tubing.** Hold onto the catheter tubing so it doesn't accidentally pull out. Wipe away any crusty deposits that build up on it. Rinse well. If you're a man, apply Vaseline to the opening of the urethra after cleaning. This will help prevent friction.
- **Clean the skin around the catheter.**
 - With soap, water, and a clean washcloth, wash the area where the catheter exits your body. Continue to wash in a circular motion, moving away from the catheter.
 - Remove any blood, crust, or mucus.
 - If you're a woman, always clean from front to back after going to the bathroom so you don't move germs from the anus to the urethra.
 - Rinse and pat the area dry.
 - Put the washcloth in the laundry and don't use it again until it's been washed.
- **Secure the catheter and bag in place.** Secure the drainage tubing to your leg with tape or a leg strap. If you're using a large bag, make sure it's securely attached to your bed. Allow some extra tubing to help keep the tube from pulling.
- **Wash your hands** again with soap and water.

Emptying the bag

Empty the bag every day or any time it's about half full. Follow these steps when you empty the bag:

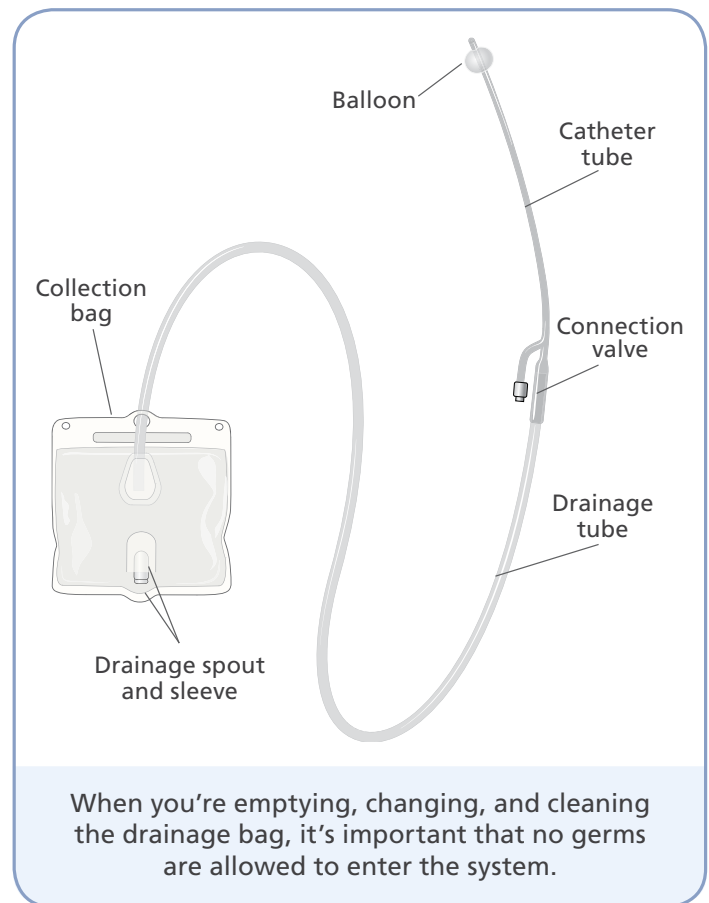
- **Wash your hands** with soap and water.
- **Get a container** to empty the bag into, and put it beside you on the floor. Or, you can empty the bag into the toilet.
- **Remove the drainage spout** from its sleeve at the bottom of the bag. Be careful not to touch the tip of the spout.
- **Open the valve on the spout**, and let the urine drain into the container or toilet. Don't let the drainage spout touch anything.
- **When the bag is empty, clean the end of the drain spout** with an alcohol wipe. Close the valve, and put the spout back in its sleeve.
- **Wash your hands** again with soap and water.

Changing bags

If you wear a leg bag during the day, change to a large drainage bag when you go to bed. When you get out of bed, you can change back to a leg bag if you prefer.

Follow these steps when you change bags:

- **Wash your hands** with soap and water.
- **Gather your supplies.** You will need a clean bag, some alcohol wipes, and an irrigation syringe.
- **Disconnect the catheter tube** from the drainage tube at the connection valve. Make sure that neither of the tubes touches anything.
- **Clean the end of the catheter tube** with an alcohol wipe. With another alcohol wipe, clean the end of the drainage tube of the clean bag.
- **Attach the catheter tube** to the drainage tube of the clean bag.



Cleaning and storing bags

Each time you change bags, clean the one you're not using and hang it to dry. Follow these steps when you clean and store bags:

- **Wash your hands** with soap and water.
- **Using an irrigation syringe, fill the used bag** with 1 part white vinegar and 3 parts water. Leave the mixture in the bag for at least 20 minutes.
- **Empty and rinse the bag**, and hang it with the valve open so it will dry.
- **When it's dry, store the bag** in a clean plastic bag until you need to use it again.
- **Wash your hands** again with soap and water.

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