



Bladder & Bowel UK

Supporting people with bladder and bowel problems

part of Disabled Living

Teen Talk: Clean Intermittent Catheterisation (CIC)



Understanding your body:

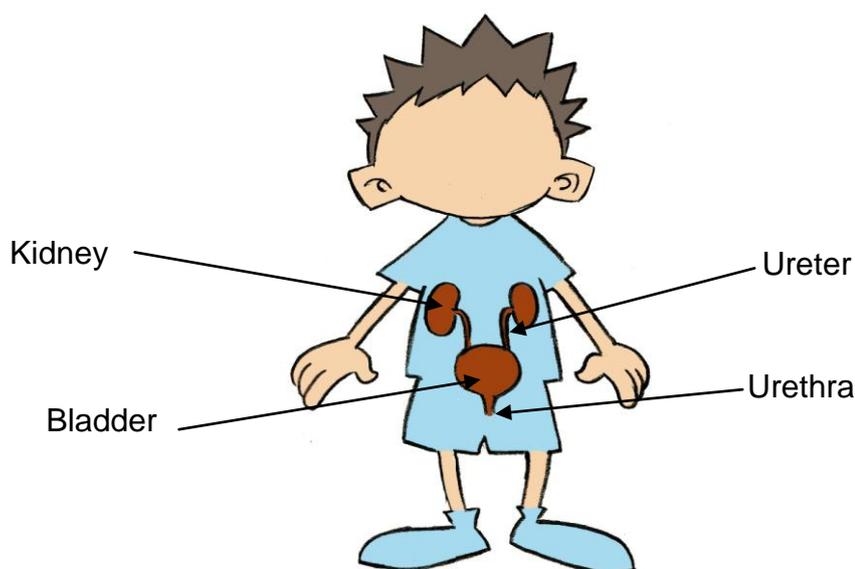
Having a basic understanding of how your body makes, stores and gets rid of urine (wee), will help you to understand why you need to catheterise.

Where does wee come from?

Every time you eat and drink your body absorbs liquid. Any extra liquid is passed to your kidneys. The kidneys have a filter system that removes waste products (rubbish, not needed by your body) and excess water from the body by making them into urine.

Each kidney is connected to the bladder by a thin tube called a ureter. As soon as it is made the urine passes out of the kidneys, travelling down the ureters, to be stored in the bladder. The bladder is a bit like a balloon. It is made of a special type of muscle that is able to stretch as it fills with urine.

We have two kidneys, two ureters (one for each kidney) and one bladder. There is another tube that connects the bladder to the outside world. That is called the urethra. In females the urethra is usually about 4cm long. In males it is about 20cm long. There is a control mechanism at the top of the urethra, which is a special muscle called the sphincter. The sphincter keeps urine securely stored in the bladder.



The bladder tells the brain when it needs to be emptied. When you get to the toilet the brain tells the control mechanism that you are at the toilet and the sphincter relaxes. This allows the urine to drain out of the bladder, through the urethra. Once you have finished having a wee, the bladder should be empty. As kidneys are producing wee all the time, the bladder will start to gradually fill up again straight away.

What is clean intermittent catheterisation?

Catheterisation is the process of passing a small, soft flexible tube, a bit like a straw, into the bladder to allow all the urine to drain out. If the catheter is removed as soon as the bladder is empty this is called clean intermittent catheterisation or CIC.

Why do I need to catheterise?

Your nurse or doctor will explain the reasons why you need to catheterise. However, there are several different reasons why people may need to use a catheter. These include:

- Your bladder not telling your brain when it is full of wee. This means that your bladder will just empty when it is ready, without letting you know, so you will get very wet.
- Your bladder not emptying completely. If some urine is always left behind in your bladder after you have done a wee, then you are at risk of developing urinary tract (wee) infections, also known as a UTI.
- The pressure in your bladder is very high. Emptying your bladder regularly with a catheter helps to reduce the pressure. This helps to keep your kidneys healthy.

Some frequently asked questions:

How long does it take?

It does not take much longer than doing a wee – so not long.

Will it hurt?

No. Catheterising does not hurt. Some people do not feel the catheter going in at all. Others say it feels a bit strange at first. Some people find it makes them feel as if they want to have a wee. When you first start to use a catheter, your nurse may suggest that you use a special lubricating cream, to make the catheter more slippery. This will help it to slide into your bladder more easily.

How will I know if I am doing it right?

Your nurse will give you lots of help and show you the correct way to catheterise. There are also lots of booklets and DVDs that show the correct way to do it.

How long will I have to use the catheter for?

Many people need to keep catheterising for years. Some need to do it for all of their lives, to keep their bladder and kidneys healthy. Your doctor or nurse will explain the reasons you need to use a catheter and will talk to you about what you could change, or what other options there are for you. They will also keep a check on your bladder and kidneys.

Can I learn to catheterise myself?

Yes you can. Some people may always need some help, but most people learn to catheterise themselves without any help. Your nurse or doctor will have lots of information booklets, pictures and practical suggestions to help to explain what you need to do and the best way for you.

It is always easier to learn to pull the catheter out, before you learn how to put the catheter in. Your nurse will help you to learn.

Most people learn to catheterise themselves while sitting on the toilet. However, others find it easier when lying on a bed or sitting in their wheelchair. You will need to find the place that works best for you. Some girls learn to catheterise by using a mirror. Most boys manage without this.

I am embarrassed to look at myself 'down there'

We are all different shapes and sizes and it is normal to be worried about whether you are the same as everyone else. Young women are often self-conscious about the appearance of their vagina, when looking in a mirror. Young men often worry about the size or shape of their penis. You are unique as an individual and we are not all the same.

Are there different types of catheter available?

Yes. It is important that boys always use long length catheters (also called 'male' catheters). Girls can use any catheter they find suitable. There are different makes and sizes of catheters and your nurse should be able to help you to choose the one which you find easiest to use.

Intermittent catheters are usually lubricated, so they are slippery and slide in easily. Some catheters are not lubricated and these need to have a separate lubrication cream or jelly applied before they are used.

There are some catheters which are designed for travelling, when you are away from your usual facilities. Many of these are smaller to carry and some have a drainage bag attached, to make collecting the urine easier.

Do I have to watch what I eat and drink?

You can eat and drink normally, but it is important to avoid getting constipated. Constipation can cause urine retention and urinary tract infections. Therefore, it is a good idea to eat plenty of fruit and vegetables. We should all be having at least five portions of fruit and/or vegetables per day.

A good fluid intake is important for everyone. You should try to drink 6-8 water-based drinks per day, that is about 1500- 2000mls each day. This will help to keep your urine dilute. Some drinks can irritate the bladder and make you want to wee more often. These include fizzy drinks, alcohol and drinks with caffeine in them. Tea, coffee, hot chocolate, cola and many energy drinks contain caffeine.

How much equipment do I need to carry around with me?

You only need to carry your catheters and some wet wipes, so that you can always clean your hands.

Modern catheters are very small and discrete. They can be stored in small packets or bags that are no bigger than a mobile phone. For girls some catheters are even smaller.

Make sure that you always have enough catheter supplies with you to last the time you will be away from home. It is a good idea to have a few spares, in case you are away longer than you expect. If you are somewhere regularly (e.g. school, college or a friend's house) you could store some there in a toilet bag.

Will I be able to catheterise in a public or school toilet and will the environment be clean enough?

You will be able to do your catheterisation anywhere. This includes public toilets. It is just important to remember to wash your hands first. It is a good idea to carry some wet wipes, in case there is nowhere to wash your hands. Some catheters have a drainage bag attached, which makes it easy to catheterise if there is no toilet available.

If you attend a school or college, discuss your needs to catheterise with them. They should support your needs and may allocate a private toilet for you to use.

Can I use the catheter when I am out and about: at school or college, at festivals or on holiday?

Yes. Just follow the same hygiene rules that you have been told about, especially with washing your hands. If you cannot get to the toilet to catheterise, any clean and private area can be used.

Many of the catheter companies provide small, discrete travel bags that can be used to store some basic items when you are away from home. Ask the company that supplies your catheters, if you think this would be useful.

I am going abroad. I am worried that I will get stopped by airport security and everyone will see my catheters.

Ask your GP or nurse to give you a letter to say that you have catheter supplies in your luggage and these are needed for a medical condition. You can ask to have a private check at security. Look on your airline or airports website before you travel for more information.

Carry some catheters in your hand luggage, in case your suitcase gets lost.

What should I do if I am abroad and my suitcase has got lost with my catheters in it?

It is a good idea to have enough catheters in your hand luggage to last you a few days. Make sure that you have the helpline telephone number for your catheter supply company with you. Many companies will arrange for urgent supplies to be sent to lots of different countries. It is worth checking with your company before you travel, so you know what to do if you run out of supplies while you are away.

Do I need special travel insurance?

It is strongly recommended that you take out medical insurance when travelling abroad. If you are travelling within the European Economic Community (EEC) you can apply for a free European Health Insurance Card (EHIC Card). This does not replace travel insurance, but does allow emergency medical help in Europe at the moment. It is not currently clear if this will continue after March 2019, when the UK is due to leave the EEC.

What if I am out and cannot find a toilet?

It is very important that you empty your bladder regularly. Therefore, you do have to plan your catheterisation as much as you can. You should catheterise before you go out, if you think there might not be a toilet where you are going. In an emergency you may have to do what everyone does in such circumstances, and go behind a bush!

What if there is nowhere for me to wash my hands?

It is a good idea to always carry a small pack of wet wipes with you. You can use these to clean your hands if there is no running water where you are.

I am going on a Duke of Edinburgh expedition, which means five days with no toilet facilities. How can I do this and my friends not find out?

Speak to the leader, who will be able to arrange some privacy for you. You may want to talk to a close friend, who can provide you with extra support. Many young people learn to catheterise in different positions and learn to do so discretely in the same way as others find somewhere private to have a wee.

What if I am out for longer than I expect to be and I haven't got any catheters with me?

It is important to always have a spare catheter with you. Your doctor or nurse should have explained to you the results of not catheterising when you should. Some people may get wet if they delay catheterising. Others may risk serious damage to their bladder. If this is you, then you will need to go to a walk-in centre and explain your need for urgent catheterisation.

How do I catheterise when I have my period?

Your period should not cause any problems for catheterisation. Just make sure you clean your vulval area before you catheterise. You can use tampons if you want to.

What happens if I need to catheterise when I am out with my girl/boyfriend?

Excuse your self in the same way as you would to go to the toilet and take your supplies with you. You can catheterise yourself in any toilet.

Will catheterising affect my sex life in any way?

No. It is a good idea to catheterise before intimate contact so that your bladder is empty. This will help to avoid any accidental leakage of urine.

Can I still do sports?

It is a good idea to catheterise before you start playing sports, even if this is earlier than you would normally catheterise.

What should I do when I move away from home?

You will need to register with a nearby GP when you move away. This includes if you move away to study at a college or university. Some colleges and universities have their own medical team – the admissions department should be able to explain the local arrangements.

Before you leave home, ask your GP to provide you with a summary of your medical condition, a list of any medication you take and with details of all the catheter supplies you use. If you use a catheter supply company to deliver products to your home, you will need to let them know your new address and GP details. This is so they can arrange delivery to your new address and still obtain prescriptions for your supplies.

Where can I get more information?

Bladder and Bowel UK have a confidential helpline:

Tel: 0161 607 8219 Email: bladderandboweluk@disabledliving.co.uk

Website: www.bladderandboweluk.co.uk

Bladder and Bowel UK, working under the umbrella of Disabled Living, provides impartial advice and information regarding resources, products and services for children and adults with bladder and bowel problems.

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