

# Wellness Education

## The Basics of Intermittent Self-Catheterization

You use intermittent self-catheterization as a way to completely empty your bladder on a regular schedule. It keeps the bladder healthy—and it's one of the keys to independence. Managing your intermittent self-catheterization regimen offers more control of your daily schedule. It also allows you to resume an active social life and the freedom to seek out the activities you enjoy.

When you're first learning intermittent self-catheterization, small setbacks can happen. The good news is that many thousands of people have had setbacks and still manage to master the catheterization technique. It just takes training and practice. So be patient- you will be an expert in no time! Here is some basic information about intermittent self-catheterization as it relates to your overall well-being.

### How does urine pass through the excretory system?

Urine is made in the kidneys and passes to the bladder by way of the ureters. The bladder stores urine until the brain sends a signal triggering the bladder that it is getting full. You then pass urine out of the body by way of the urethra. The body needs an intact, healthy spinal cord for all of this to happen.

You may be one of the many people who have injuries to the spinal cord. Depending on the location of the injury, your bladder may have limitations related to either emptying or storing urine (the same may be true of emptying the bowels.) It is for this reason that intermittent self-catheterization may be the best way for you to empty your bladder and to keep your urinary tract system healthy.

### Why do people rely on intermittent self-catheterization?

People perform intermittent self-catheterization for any number of reasons:

- Spinal cord injury
- Certain diseases or conditions such as spina bifida, Parkinson's disease, diabetes or multiple sclerosis (MS)
- A result of surgery or certain medications
- Problems with urinary retention (being unable to empty your bladder completely)
- Urinary incontinence (leaking of urine, or inability to control when you urinate)

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### How do I insert the catheter?

Gather all of your supplies: new sterile catheter, water-soluble lubricant (never use petrolatum based products), antiseptic towelette or soap and water, dry hand towel. Wash your hands very well and dry them.

**For Women** Separate the labia and gently clean the area around the urethral opening (use soap and water or moist towelette). Wash from front to back. Lubricate the catheter (from the insertion tip and up 2 inches). Slowly insert the catheter into the urethra about 1- 1.5 inches, until urine starts to flow. Insert the catheter another 1 inch and keep it there until the urine stops flowing. Begin to withdraw the catheter slowly while slightly rotating it. (If you are using a coudeé or curved tip catheter, do not rotate.) Stop briefly each time more urine drains out.

Throw away the catheter after using it (put in a plastic bag or wrap in a paper towel) and wash your hands once more.

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**For Men** Gently clean the head of the penis and the penis tip (use soap and water or moist towelette). Use a circular motion, starting at the urethra. Lubricate the catheter (from the insertion tip and up 6 inches). Slowly insert the catheter into the urethra about 6-8 inches, until urine starts to flow. Insert the catheter another 1 inch and keep it there until the urine stops flowing. Begin to withdraw the catheter slowly while slightly rotating it. (If you are using a coudé or curved tip catheter, do not rotate). Stop briefly each time more urine drains out.

Throw away the catheter after using it (put in a plastic bag or wrap in a paper towel) and wash your hands once more.

### What if I'm in a public bathroom?

The same rules of hygiene apply whether you're at home, at a friend's house or in a public restroom. If you need to touch anything after you wash your hands—your wheelchair rims or the door—it's important to use hand sanitizing gel or wash again! If a sink and water aren't available, you can use the antiseptic towelette to clean the urethral area before you insert the catheter. Many people find it helpful to keep needed supplies in a plastic bag. When you are finished, you can discard your used items in the bag.

### What options do I have with catheters?

There are many types and brands of intermittent catheters made from different materials that offer various lengths, sizes, tips and position of the opening. Women may choose between a standard straight catheter or the more discreet compact catheter. Men or women who are experiencing trouble inserting the catheter may require a curved (coudé) catheter tip or a pre-lubricated hydrophilic catheter.

Some people experience frequent urinary tract infections (UTI's), and may benefit from the use of the following:  
**Sterile catheter kit**—Each kit has a sterile catheter, lubricant and sterile gloves.

**Closed catheter system**—Each single and kit type closed system has a sterile catheter and a urine collection bag all in one unit. The advantage is that this type of sterile catheter tip is not exposed to bacteria usually found at the urethral opening.

**Note:** Speak with your physician or clinician when considering these new options. Some catheters may require a new prescription to qualify for insurance coverage.

### What should I look for in the urine?

Normally urine is clear yellow and has little to no odor. However some foods—such as asparagus, onions, and food from the cabbage family such as broccoli—can produce odor in urine. Medications may also produce odor or color changes in urine, so check with your pharmacist about the medications you take. If you see darker, more concentrated urine that has a stronger odor; it may indicate that you are not drinking enough liquids.

You might also notice sediment or mucus shreds in the urine, which is usually normal. Sediment or mucus shreds are caused by a natural process of the body regularly shedding dead cells from the bladder lining. Small amounts of blood in the urine may occur from the process of inserting the catheter in to the urethra. Large amounts of blood, however—enough to make the urine the color of cranberry juice—can be a symptom of another problem, possibly a urinary tract infection. In this case you should call your physician or clinician immediately.

### Signs & Symptoms of a Urinary Track Infection

The symptoms of a UTI may include:

- Fever, chills
- Urgency or unexpected urine leakage
- Increased spasms of legs, abdomen and/or bladder
- Pain above the pubic bone area
- Headache
- Nausea
- Loss of appetite
- Fatigue
- Feeling poorly
- Increased mucus in your urine
- Cloudy and strong smelling urine (unrelated to foods that can cause urine odor)
- Mental confusion (especially in an older person)
- Blood in the urine (enough blood to make the urine the color of cranberry juice)

If you notice any of these symptoms, contact your physician immediately.

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### How do I keep my skin healthy?

Whenever you shower or bathe, take a look at your skin in the urethral area (use a handheld mirror to help you see). There is the possibility that moisture from urine can irritate the skin if you experience leaking or use absorptive pads, padded undergarments or condom catheters (male external catheters). Contact your clinician if there is any pain, tenderness, sign of redness or irritation. Always clean your urethral area well each time you catheterize, to help maintain healthy skin.

### Troubleshooting tips

When you're first learning to do intermittent self-catheterization, it's not unusual to encounter difficulties. Some people find they're successful if they pause, take a deep breath and try one more time. Some common issues others who catheterize have dealt with include:

**Finding the urethral opening:** A handheld mirror can be very useful.

**Experiencing pain when inserting the catheter:** It may be uncomfortable when first starting to use intermittent self-catheterization. Try to relax and use plenty of lubrication. If the discomfort continues or you are experiencing pain, you should inform your physician or clinician immediately. Many catheter options are available that may help such as a hydrophilic or curved tip (coudé) catheter.

**Reaching the toilet:** This type of challenge can occur especially if you're in a wheelchair. Try extension tubing with your catheter. This extra tubing connects to your catheter and extends to the toilet.

**Handling the catheter:** People who have a spinal cord injury may have limited hand dexterity. If you experience problems handling the catheter, try a different type such as:

- Funnel-end catheter- it offers a wider end you can grasp..
- 16-inch catheter- allows female the ability to loop catheter around the hand for a better grip.
- Closed catheter system- this self contained, one piece unit may be easier to handle.

If you continue to experience difficulty due to dexterity issues ask your physician or clinician about seeing an occupational therapist, who may be able to offer additional one-on-one advice.

**Note:** Speak with your physician or clinician when considering these new options. Some catheters may require a new prescription to qualify for insurance coverage.

### Are there tips to help me keep on schedule?



At first some people use charts, which are a good visual cue. Charts are also helpful if your physician wants you to keep track of the amount of urine you pass. Other suggestions might be to set a watch or a cell phone alarm. Remember that it's

very important to maintain your intermittent self-catheterization schedule. This helps keep your bladder healthy, can help avoid leaking and possibly help prevent urinary tract infections.

### Special Considerations

**What advice do you have for using an external (condom) catheter?** At times, people may experience leakage between intermittent self-catheterizations, often during the night. Men may be advised to use a male external collection system. The system consists of a male external catheter (sometimes called a condom catheter) which is a sheath that fits over the penis and is attached to a urine collection bag (sometimes called a drainage bag).

The key to success when using a male external catheter is getting the right diameter size of catheter, as well as the sheath length. This can help prevent leakage. A sizing guide is available for each type of male external catheter from the manufacturer or from your supplier.

There are different types of male external catheters. One of the most often used is a self-adhesive male external catheter that has a clear sheath. The clear sheath allows you to see the skin of the penis to ensure that there are no changes or irritation. A male external catheter must always be connected to a urine collection bag. There are different types of drainage bags. One type of drainage bag attaches to your bed or chair and holds larger amounts of urine. There is also a drainage bag that attaches to the leg and is more discreet for daytime use. The bag will need to be replaced on a regular basis. Check with your insurer for monthly usage guidelines.

If you use a condom catheter, make sure you follow these guidelines:

- To prevent backflow of urine, keep the drainage bag below the level of the bladder so that urine will flow downward via gravity
- To prevent pulling, keep the tubing secured to your upper thigh at all times. There are catheter straps or anchors that attach to the thigh to ensure the catheter and tubing remain in place
- Make sure the tubing is straight, with no kinks
- Regularly empty the urine collection bag (always leave a small amount of urine in the bag to avoid creating a vacuum which prevents the urine from draining in to the drainage bag). If a vacuum should occur, briefly disconnect the tubing of the drainage bag from the catheter. This should restore the flow of urine.

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## How do I clean the drainage bag?

There are several methods to clean your urine drainage bag. Use the one suggested by your health care provider.

- Vinegar solution: 4 ounces of vinegar to one quart water, OR...
- Bleach solution: 1 ounce of household bleach to 1 quart of tap water (Do not use bleach or other household products to clean latex bags.) OR...
- Commercially prepared cleansers that are available from your medical supplier

### To clean the urine collection bag:

- Detach the bag from the catheter
- Fill the bag with the prepared solution
- Soak for 20-30 minutes.
- Rinse with clear water and hang to dry

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## Some final comments

It is sometimes difficult to learn how to do intermittent self-catheterization. This is especially true if you have vision problems, limited hand dexterity or other physical challenges. However, it's very likely that you can still master the technique—and you'll rely on those skills for many years to come. Talk to your clinician or physician for suggestions, and don't get discouraged. Once you do master intermittent self-catheterization as a part of your bladder management routine it will offer much more freedom to your schedule—and your lifestyle.

If you have any questions regarding intermittent self-catheterization, product usage or availability please contact a Coloplast Consumer Care Specialists at 1-888-726-7872.

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