

Wellness Education

Bladder Hygiene: Keys to Better Bladder Health

Intermittent self-catheterization is a way to completely empty the bladder on a regular schedule. Cleanliness and hygiene need to be a top priority in the management of your bladder, especially during catheter insertion. Bacteria are present all around us— such as at work, at home, on your wheelchair. However following some simple steps, you can make sure that you insert your catheter in a clean and safe way.

What guidelines can I follow?

Always keep in the mind the “Keys to Better Bladder Health.”

1. Regularly empty your bladder
2. Discard your catheter after each use
3. Drink adequate fluids
4. Use proper hand-washing techniques
5. Take all medication as prescribed by your physician.

These are described in more detail below.

How often should I empty my bladder?

Each day you will need to catheterize the number of times your physician or clinician has recommended. This is important since it's best to keep a low volume of urine in your bladder at any given time. If urine stays in the bladder for too long, bacteria can multiply. This bacteria growth can possibly cause a urinary tract infection (UTI). In addition, too much urine can over-stretch the bladder and lead to leakage or kidney damage. So it's best to follow your set schedule for intermittent self-catheterization.

Keep in mind that the number of times you catheterize will be based on your level of activity, as well as your typical fluid intake. If you change your fluid intake or activity level, you may also need to change how often you catheterize. Therefore, it is important to discuss your current activity lifestyle with your physician or clinician during each visit.

How often should I discard my catheter?

Medicare guidelines changed in April 2008. They are now recommending a new sterile catheter for each time you perform intermittent self- catheterization (up to 200 catheters per month). Medicare made this change to help prevent Urinary Tract Infections.

Although most insurance carriers follow these Medicare guidelines, it is important to check your individual insurance policy as it relates to coverage and /or any out-of-pocket expenses for your medical supplies.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your policy coverage call your insurance provider for clarification.

Why is it so important to drink plenty of fluids?



This is important for your overall health, as well as, the health of your bladder. As mentioned above, stagnant urine in the bladder can become a breeding ground for bacteria. You want to drink enough fluids to keep the urine clear and use the catheter as prescribed to prevent urine from sitting in the bladder too long.

The amount you should drink depends on how much you exercise, what medical conditions you have, what medications you take and whether you're in a warm environment or perspiring a lot. Talk to your physician or clinician about how much you need to drink each day, since the amount may differ from person to person. Water is the best thing to drink, but you can certainly vary your fluids to maintain adequate hydration.

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There are some beverages and foods that are known or thought to be bladder irritants. This is not a problem for most, but if you experience leakage between catheterizations, these fluids or foods could be a contributing factor. If this is an issue, you might want to limit the following:

- Alcoholic beverages
- Caffeine – coffee, tea and dark carbonated drinks
- Chocolate
- Artificial sweeteners
- Citrus fruits and juices
- Milk or milk products
- Spicy foods

Why is hand washing so important?



Germs accumulate on your hands in many ways such as - surfaces you touch, contact with other people and contact with animals. As an intermittent catheter user, it's especially important to wash your hands correctly, and often.

- Use warm water and soap (antibacterial soap is not essential).
- Lather, then rub vigorously for 20 seconds—the friction removes dirt from your skin.
- Wash all areas: the back of the hands, wrists, fingertips and cuticles. Don't forget between the fingers, under fingernails and jewelry.
- Rinse, then dry hands with a clean paper towel.
- Avoid touching the sink.
- If after washing your hands you touch your wheelchair rims or the door, make sure to use a hand sanitizer or wash your hands again before touching your catheter. By washing your hands properly, you will avoid transferring germs to the catheter and into your body. It's especially critical to wash your hands before and after you insert the catheter.
- Whenever possible use a paper towel to turn off the faucet and on the door handle as you exit.

How do I know if I have a UTI?

Urinary Tract Infections (UTI's) are not uncommon—they are the reason for approximately 4 million physicians' visits per year in the U.S. People who use catheters are at higher risk for UTIs, so it's important to know the signs and symptoms.

Bacteria alone in the urine do not signal a UTI. Most people have a certain amount of bacteria in the urine, which are well tolerated. However, if bacteria multiply to a high enough level, you may develop an infection and you will start to notice symptoms.

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. If you have an infection and are prescribed antibiotics, be sure to take the entire prescription as directed. It is a mistake to stop taking the medication when you start to feel better, as it can lead to antibiotic resistance (this makes it harder to treat future infections of any type).

How can I help prevent UTIs?

You can follow some simple steps:

- Follow hand-washing guidelines.
- Catheterize on schedule.
- Throw away your catheter after each use or as directed by your physician or clinician.
- Drink enough fluids—about 1.5 quarts of liquid each day helps keep bacteria flushed out of your system. These amounts may vary according to your activities and/or medical issues.
- When using toilet paper or moist towelette, women should always wipe from front to back. This keeps bacteria (from feces) away from your urethra, as that is where you insert your catheter.
- Wear loose-fitting clothes. Tight pants can cause you to sweat, and a moist, warm environment allows bacteria to multiply.
- If you are a postmenopausal woman, speak with your physician or clinician about possibly using a low-dose topical vaginal estrogen. It can improve the health of the vaginal tissue and may foster “healthy” bacteria in the vaginal area near the urethra.
- Ask your physician if you can take Vitamin C to increase the acidity of your urine.

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- If you have frequent UTI's (more than two within a 12 month period) it may be recommended that you use a sterile closed catheter system (a one-piece unit that contains both a catheter and a urine collection bag).
- It's also helpful to drink pure cranberry juice, and a low-calorie juice may be best. If you don't like the taste of cranberry juice—or to avoid the sugar often in the juice—you might check with your physician about taking cranberry pills with water. Always check with your clinician or physician before adding cranberry juice to your diet. Some people need to avoid cranberry juice when taking certain types of medications (especially some blood thinners).

When should I call my physician or clinician?

You should contact your health care provider if you have symptoms of a UTI (see above), or if the following occur:

- It is too painful to insert the catheter, or you cannot get it in.
- You have a fever over 100° Fahrenheit.
- You have back pain in the area of the kidneys.
- You notice a sudden start of leaking in between catheterizations.
- You have an odor to your urine not associated to food (asparagus, etc).
- You have noticeable discoloration or blood in the urine.

How can I minimize odor?

If your urine has a strong odor due to certain foods you've eaten, you can use sprays to neutralize the bathroom odor. It's better to use neutralizing sprays than strongly scented sprays that merely cover up odors. To prevent odor from forming in the urine, you might take Vitamin C tablets or deodorizing tablets by mouth, as long as your physician says it's okay. If urine drips onto the carpet, you can use spot carpet cleaning and deodorizing products. Some of the foods that may cause an odor to the urine include onions, asparagus, eggs, garlic, fish, cabbage and broccoli (to name a few).

To prevent odor in your clothing, wear clothes that are easy to move out of the way so that urine won't spill onto the fabric. If urine has leaked onto your outer clothes or undergarments, change them. When buying underwear, breathable cotton is a better option than synthetic materials.

If you wear absorbent disposable briefs or pads, buy ones that help reduce odors, rather than ones with perfume. Wear the briefs or pads close to the body. You can keep them in place by wearing a stretch brief or incontinence pant. Make sure you change these briefs or pads often enough to avoid excess moisture next to your skin. Damp products can potentially cause both odor and skin irritation. Dispose of these products in an airtight container such as a zip-style plastic bag.

Shower or take a bath regularly, and especially after physical activity. You should also wash your entire genital area every day to help reduce the possibility of odor. If you're concerned that your body, your clothes or your bathroom has a urine odor, ask someone close to you to give you honest feedback.

Are there other tips I should know about?

Catheterize on schedule to help avoid leaking or possible urinary tract infections. To help stay on a regular schedule; you can use a chart, which offers a good visual cue. You might also want to consider setting a watch or a cell phone alarm.

Some final comments

As you know, intermittent self-catheterization allows you to remain healthy and keep active. Use of good hygiene is equally important; it can allow you to feel more confident and can help reduce your chance of infection. For better bladder health, remember to follow your schedule, use a new catheter each time and promptly report any changes to your physician or clinician.

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

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Ostomy Care
Urology & Continence Care
Wound & Skin Care

Coloplast develops products and services that make life easier for people with very personal and private medical conditions. Working closely with the people who use our products, we create solutions that are sensitive to their special needs. We call this intimate healthcare. Our business includes ostomy care, urology and continence care and wound and skin care. We operate globally and employ more than 7,000 people.

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