

Caring for a Urinary Catheter

Preventing an infection (CAUTI)

This handout explains a catheter-associated urinary tract infection (CAUTI). It includes how the infection develops, how it is treated, and care that will help prevent it.

What is a urinary catheter?

A *urinary catheter* is a thin tube that is placed in your bladder to drain urine (pee) from your body. The urine drains through the tube into a bag that collects the fluid. A urinary catheter may be used:

- If you cannot urinate on your own.
- To measure the amount of urine that you make. This may be needed if you are receiving intensive care treatment.
- During and after some types of surgery.
- During some tests of the kidneys and bladder.

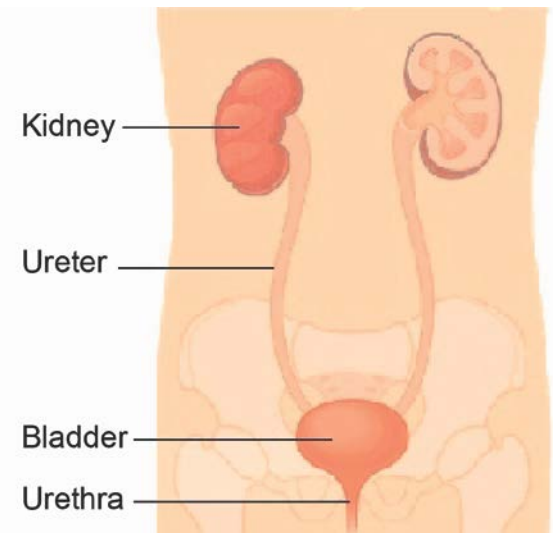
What is a urinary tract infection?

A *urinary tract infection* (UTI) is an infection in the urinary system. The urinary system includes:

- The *bladder*, which stores urine
- *Kidneys*, which filter the blood and make urine

A UTI can occur when germs that do not normally live in these areas enter the urinary tract.

If you have a urinary catheter, germs can travel up the catheter and cause an infection in your bladder or kidneys. This is called a *catheter-associated urinary tract infection* (CAUTI).



Germs can travel up the urinary catheter and cause an infection in your bladder or kidneys.

People with urinary catheters have a much higher chance of getting a UTI than people who do not have a catheter. Germs can enter your urinary tract when the catheter is being put in, or while the catheter is in place.

What are the symptoms of a UTI?

Symptoms of a urinary tract infection include:

- Burning or pain in your lower abdomen (below your stomach)
- Fever
- Bloody urine (this may also be caused by other problems)
- Burning when you urinate (pee)
- An increase in how often you have to urinate after the catheter is removed

Some people with a CAUTI do not have these symptoms.

How is a urinary tract infection treated?

Most CAUTIs are treated with antibiotics and by removing or changing the catheter. Your doctor will decide which antibiotic is best for you.

What is UWMC doing to prevent these infections?

To prevent a CAUTI:

- You will have a catheter put in only if it is needed. It will be removed as soon as possible.
- Only properly trained staff will put your catheter in. They will use *sterile* (germ-free) methods to do this.
- Your providers will wear gloves before touching your catheter.
- Before the catheter is put in, we will clean your skin in the area where it will be inserted.
- Other ways to drain your urine may be used. Two of these are:
 - *External catheters* for men. These catheters look like condoms. They are placed over the penis, not in the penis.
 - A *temporary catheter* to drain the urine. This type of catheter is used only when you need to urinate, and then removed right away. This is called *intermittent urethral catheterization* or an “in and out” catheterization.

Catheter and Skin Care to Prevent a CAUTI

- Catheter care is done 1 to 2 times a day and as needed. This care includes cleaning the catheter, your skin around the catheter, and your thighs, bottom, and private areas.

- The catheter tubing is attached to your leg to prevent pulling, twisting, or kinking of your catheter. This will be repositioned as needed.

How can I help prevent a urinary tract infection?

- **Ask your healthcare provider every day whether you still need the catheter.**
- You and your providers should clean your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand gel before and after touching your catheter.
- Keep the catheter bag lower than your bladder so that urine does not flow back into your bladder.
- Keep the bag off the floor.

If you do not see your providers clean their hands, please ask them to do so.

What do I need to do when I leave the hospital?

If you will be going home with a catheter:

- Your doctor or nurse will explain everything you need to know about catheter care. Make sure you understand how to care for your catheter before you leave the hospital.
- Call your doctor or nurse right away if you have any of these symptoms of a UTI:
 - Burning or pain in your lower abdomen
 - Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as instructed by your care team
 - An increase in how often you have to urinate
- Before you leave the hospital, make sure you know who to contact if you have questions or problems after you get home.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

This information has been adapted from "FAQs: About Catheter-Associated Urinary Tract Infection" by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.