



Catheter-Associated Urinary Tract Infections

This handout explains what catheter-associated urinary tract infections are, how they develop, how they are treated, and care that will help prevent them.

What is a catheter-associated urinary tract infection?

A *urinary tract infection* (UTI) is an infection in the urinary system. The urinary system includes the bladder, which stores urine, and the kidneys, which filter the blood to make urine. When some germs that do not normally live in these areas are introduced, an infection can occur.

If you have a urinary catheter, germs can travel along the catheter and cause an infection in your bladder or your kidney. When that happens, it is called a *catheter-associated urinary tract infection* (CAUTI).

What is a urinary catheter?

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

- If you cannot urinate on your own
- To measure the amount of urine that you make, for example, during intensive care treatment
- During and after some types of surgery
- During some tests of the kidneys and bladder

How does someone get a CAUTI?

When certain germs get into your urinary tract, they can cause an infection. Many of the germs that cause a catheter-associated urinary tract infection are normally found in your intestines, but they do not usually cause an infection there.

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

People with urinary catheters have a much higher chance of getting a urinary tract infection 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 your bladder.

What are the symptoms of a UTI?

Some of the common symptoms of a urinary tract infection are:

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

Sometimes people with catheter-associated urinary tract infections do not have these symptoms of infection.

How is a CAUTI treated?

Most catheter-associated urinary tract infections are treated with antibiotics and by removing or changing the catheter. Your doctor will determine which antibiotic is best for you.

What is UWMC doing to prevent these infections?

To prevent urinary tract infections, your doctors and nurses are doing these things:

Catheter Insertion

- You will have a catheter put in only if it is needed. It will be removed as soon as possible.
- Only properly trained staff insert catheters using *sterile* (germ-free) methods.
- Your skin in the area where the catheter will be inserted is cleaned before the catheter is inserted.
- Other ways to drain your urine may be used. Two of these are:
 - *External catheters* in men. These look like condoms and 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*.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Catheter Care

- You and your health care providers should clean your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand gel before and after touching your catheter. Your health care provider will also wear gloves before touching your catheter.

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

- Do not twist, kink, or pull on your catheter.
- Keep the bag lower than your bladder so that urine does not flow back into your bladder.
- **Ask your health care provider every day if you still need the catheter.**

What do I need to do when I go home from the hospital?

- If you will be going home with a catheter, your doctor or nurse should explain everything you need to know about taking care of your catheter. Make sure you understand how to care for it before you leave the hospital.
- Call your doctor or nurse right away if you develop any of these symptoms of a urinary tract infection:
 - Burning or pain in your lower abdomen
 - Fever
 - An increase in how often you have to urinate
- Before you go home, make sure you know who to contact if you have questions or problems after you get home.

*This information has been adapted from
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UW Medicine

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
MEDICAL CENTER

Patient Care Services

1959 N.E. Pacific St. Seattle, WA 98195

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