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).
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.

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

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**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.

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**Questions?**

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

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