Permanent suprapubic catheterisation in women: frequently-asked questions

What determines whether a suprapubic or urethral catheter is chosen?

When an indwelling or long-term catheter to drain the bladder, is advised, the question of whether this is best placed in the urethra (water pipe) or suprapubically (directly into the bladder through the skin over the bladder) arises.

A number of issues are considered in this question and are discussed below.

Some problems related to catheters probably occur equally often with urethral or suprapubic catheters. These include:

- the risk of infection (or persistent carriage of bacteria in the urine)
- the risk of catheter blockages
- the risk of bladder spasms causing leakage of urine either around the catheter or via the urethra (water pipe) with suprapubic catheters.

In other words, neither sort of catheter has any advantage in respect of these problems.
What are the advantages of a suprapublic catheter?
The first and most obvious advantage of suprapubic catheters is that they are usually, but not always, significantly easier to change than urethral catheters. This is because the pathway from the skin to the bladder is usually straight, readily accessible, and short.

Whereas urethral catheters usually need to be changed by a District Nurse or a Doctor, it is much more likely that a carer, or possibly the patient herself, can change a suprapubic catheter.

Are there any other advantages?
A further advantage of suprapubic catheters for women is that the area round the urethra and the adjacent genitalia is not continually irritated by the presence of a catheter. This reduces soreness and discomfort.

In women who are sexually active, the absence of a urethral catheter is an obvious advantage.

How are suprapubic catheters inserted?
Suprapubic catheters are probably best inserted under a brief general anaesthetic and this usually requires an overnight stay in hospital.

What do I do if the catheter falls out?
If your catheter falls out, it must be re-inserted as soon as possible or the track into your bladder will close off rapidly.

You should contact your GP or District Nurse immediately and, if they are unable to help you, come without delay to the Accident & Emergency Department where the catheter can be replaced promptly.

If you have a supply of catheters yourself, it is reasonable to try and insert a new catheter; if you fail to do this, you should seek medical help without delay.

Who can I contact for more help or information?
Oncology Nurses
• Uro-Oncology Nurse Specialist 01223 586748
• Bladder cancer Nurse Practitioner (haematuria, chemotherapy & BCG) 01223 274608
• Prostate cancer Nurse Practitioner 01223 274608 or 216897 or bleep 154-548
• Surgical Care Practitioner 01223 348590 or 256157 or bleep 154-351
Non-Oncology Nurses
- Urology Nurse Practitioner (incontinence, urodynamics, catheter patients)
  01223 274608 or 586748 or bleep 157-237
  - Urology Nurse Practitioner (stoma care)
    01223 349800
  - Urology Nurse Practitioner (stone disease)
    01223 349800 or bleep 152-879

Patient Advice & Liaison Centre (PALS)
- Telephone
  +44 (0)1223 216756 or 257257
  +44 (0)1223 274432 or 274431
- PatientLine
  *801 (from patient bedside telephones only)
- E mail
  pals@addenbrookes.nhs.uk
- Mail
  PALS, Box No 53
  Addenbrooke’s Hospital
  Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 2QQ

Chaplaincy and Multi-Faith Community
- Telephone
  +44 (0)1223 217769
- E mail
  chaplaincy@addenbrookes.nhs.uk
- Mail
  The Chaplaincy, Box No 105
  Addenbrooke's Hospital
  Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 2QQ

MINICOM System ("type" system for the hard of hearing)
- Telephone
  +44 (0)1223 217589

Access Office (travel, parking & security information)
- Telephone
  +44 (0)1223 596060

Other information
This patient information leaflet provides input from specialists, the British Association of Urological Surgeons, the Department of Health and evidence-based sources as a supplement to any advice you may already have been given by your GP. Alternative treatments can be discussed in more detail with your urologist or Specialist Nurse.
How can I get information in alternative formats?

Please ask if you require this information in other languages, large print or audio format: 01223 216032 or patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

Polish Informacje te można otrzymać w innych językach, w wersji dużym drukiem lub audio. Zamówienia prosimy składać pod numerem: 01223 216032 lub wysyłając e-mail: patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

Portuguese Se precisar desta informação num outro idioma, em impressão de letras grandes ou formato áudio por favor telefone para o 01223 216032 ou envie uma mensagem para: patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

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Cantonese 若你需要此信息的其他語言版本、大字體版或音頻格式，請致電 01223 216032 或發郵件到: patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

Turkish Bu bilgisi diğer dillerde veya büyük baskıya, sesli formatta isterse ve lütfen su numaradan kontak kurun: 01223 216032 veya asagıdaki adrese e-posta gönderin: patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

Bengali এই তথ্য বাংলার, যে ভাষার বা অক্ষর টুপে পরীক্ষা করা হয় যা অভিব্যক্তি করা হয় না 01223 216032 নের মাধ্যমে ধরে নিন বা patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk চিন্নাইয়া ই-মেইল করন।

Addenbrooke’s is smoke-free. You cannot smoke anywhere on the site. Smoking increases the severity of some urological diseases and increases the risk of post-operative complications. For advice on quitting, contact your GP or the NHS smoking helpline free on 0800 169 0 169

Document history

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