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 suprapubic 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.

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

Non-Oncology Nurses
- Urology Nurse Practitioner (incontinence, urodynamics, catheter patients)
  01223 274608 or 586748

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
- Email derek.fraser@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 274604

Access Office (travel, parking & security information)
- Telephone +44 (0)1223 586969

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

Russian Если вам требуется эта информация на другом языке, крупным шрифтом или в аудиоформате, пожалуйста, обращайтесь по телефону 01223 216032 или на вебсайте patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

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
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**

**Author(s)**
Nikesh Thiruchelvam (on behalf of the Consultant Urologists)

**Department**
Department of Urology, Box No 43
Addenbrooke’s Hospital
Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Hills Road
Cambridge, CB2 2QQ

**Contact number**
01223 216575

**Fax number**
01223 216069

**Dept website**
www.camurology.org.uk

**First published**
May 2005

**Review date**
April 2014

**File name**
Permanent suprapubic catheterisation in women

**Version number**
6.0

**Ref**
03/Info_04_11