

What To Do Before.....A Consumer's Guide to Catheters

Q. What can be done to reduce the chances that I'll develop an infection from my catheter?

A: Prevention and early detection are the best ways to catch an infection before it spreads to your bloodstream. It's very important to keep the catheter site clean and free from the germs that cause infections. When your catheter is being cleaned or replaced, make sure your nurse always washes his or her hands and wears gloves. In some instances, he or she may also wear a mask and gown. It's not uncommon for doctors and nurses to remove a clean catheter from a sterile pack only to place it on a dirty tray! Another way to reduce infections is by using catheters that are coated with special germ-killing ointments. Your doctor may also put you on antibiotics to help you fight any germs that get into your bloodstream. Urinary catheters have the highest incidence of infections and should only be used if absolutely necessary and not for convenience of medical staff.

It's a Fact!

Catheters are used in a variety of ways when you're in the hospital.....Each catheter is used for a specific purpose such as urinary tract catheters.....Some catheters are used during diagnostic procedures while others are used to deliver medicines.....Catheters are very important but if they aren't used properly, they can lead to a serious infection.....

What To Do Before.....gives you the facts and tells you what you need to know about the use of catheters and how to avoid an infection.



Q. What are catheters?

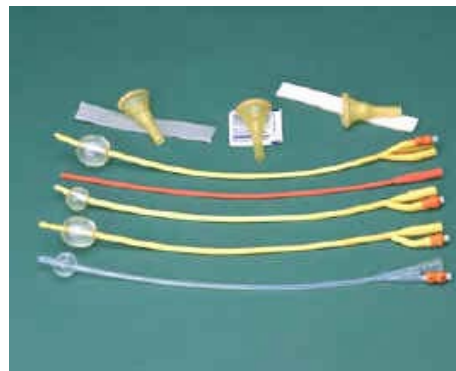
A: Catheters are thin, flexible plastic tubes that are placed inside a part of the body such as a blood vessel or in your urinary tract in the case of a Foley catheter. Catheters are used in diagnostic procedures such as cardiac catheterization (a test to determine how well your heart is working) and angiography (an x-ray that takes a picture of blood vessels).

Q. Are there different types of catheters?

A: Yes. In addition to urinary catheters, that drain urine from your bladder, there's also the "central venous catheter." Don't let the long name intimidate you. A central venous catheter is put in place by a doctor because it's usually going to be used for an extended period of time. The most common placement is in a large vein in your neck (called the "jugular") or your chest.

Q. Why are catheters used?

A: Catheters are used to drain fluids from other body cavities such as your abdomen or chest. Urinary tract catheters are used when you are unable, or it isn't a good idea, that you get out of bed every time you need to use the bathroom. The catheter is inserted through your urethra (the tube that carries urine from the bladder) and into your bladder where it drains the urine (people who have lost bladder control must use a permanent urinary catheter). Central venous catheters are used to deliver special kinds of medications, feed you highly nutritious liquids, monitor your heart and lung functions, clean your bloodstream of poisons (called dialysis), and diagnose certain heart and blood vessel illnesses.



Q. What are some signs that I may have developed an infection around my catheter?

A: Check your skin for any redness or swelling around the site of the catheter. If there's redness or swelling it could indicate an infection or it could mean your catheter needs to be cleaned or changed. If you have a urinary tract catheter, let the nurse or doctor know when you feel any pain. They will check the catheter's position to make sure it's not the reason for your pain. They will also check your urine for any signs of blood and send a urine sample to the lab to have it checked for bacteria.

Q. How does an infection occur when I have a catheter?

A: Any device that breaks your skin or is inserted into a body part is an open highway to germs in the area. They see the catheter as an open invitation to move right in!