



HAVING A PERMANENT SUPRAPUBIC CATHETER (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.

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.



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.

Are there any other important points?

This publication 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.

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