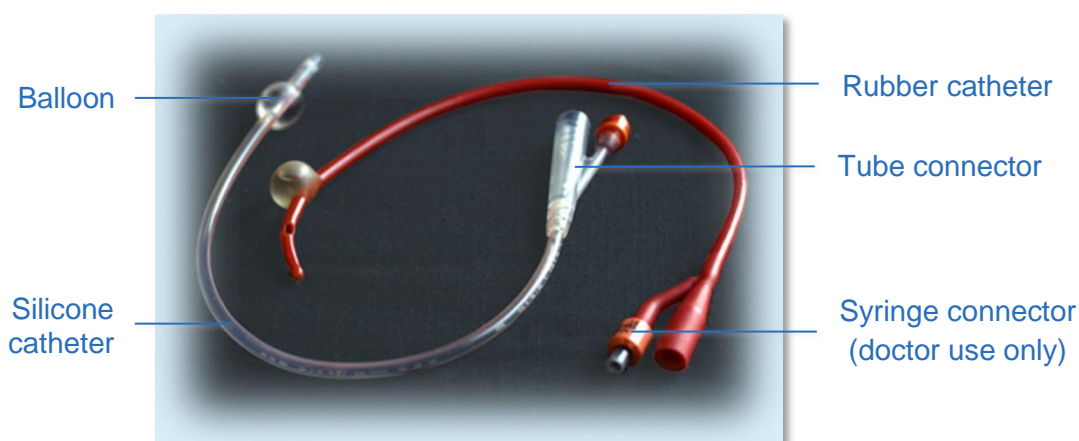


# Foley (Indwelling) Catheters

A Foley (indwelling) catheter is a thin tube that is inserted into your bladder. It stays in your bladder for up to 4 weeks at a time to drain urine. Foley catheters are often only used for short periods of time. When other options don't work, they can be the main way you empty your bladder.

Foley catheters can be linked to more health issues than other options. [Spinal Cord Essentials](#) has handouts about other bladder drainage options. Check out the [Condom Catheters](#) (men only) and [Intermittent Catheterization for Men](#) or [Women](#) handouts.



## When is a Foley Catheter Used?

Most doctors recommend using Foley catheters only for short periods of time. It might be used right after your injury or after surgery. In some cases, a Foley catheter must be used long term. This can be the case if other options don't work well. People with weak hands and who don't get help with bladder care might need one. Foley catheters can prevent bladder leaks and can help you be more independent.

## Using a Foley Catheter

Foley catheters must be put into place by a doctor or nurse. Once it is inserted, it stays in your bladder by filling a small balloon with salt water (saline). A small hole at the top of the tubing drains the urine. A Foley catheter must be changed every 3 or 4 weeks by a doctor or nurse.

**Contact your Doctor or Nurse for more information.**

**SELF CARE**

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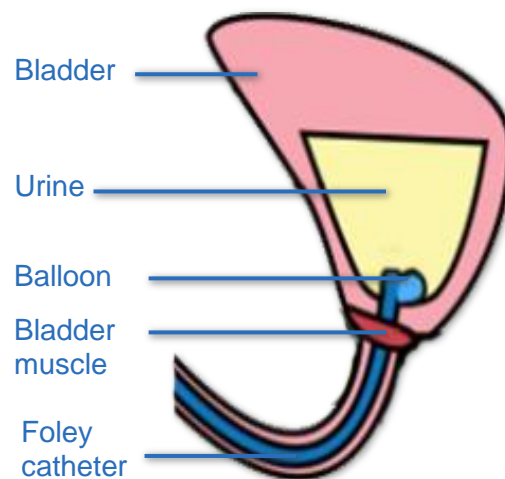
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# Foley (Indwelling) Catheters

### Caring for your Foley catheter

Taking care of your catheter is important to reduce your risk of problems. Here are some tips for caring for your Foley catheter:

- Make sure your tubing is long enough not to pull or tug on your bladder.
- Make sure your tubing is draining well. Check it for bends or twists regularly.
- When connecting the urine bag, wipe the connectors with an alcohol swab.
- Always position your urine bag below the level of your hip.
- Do not leave your urine bag on the floor where it can pick up germs.
- When washing your genital area, gently wash about 5cm (2") of the tubing also.



### Emptying and Cleaning Your Urine Bag

Empty your bag every 3 to 4 hours or when it's getting full. If your urine bag gets too full, urine can go back up the tube. This can cause urine to go back into your bladder and cause infections in your bladder and kidneys.

Wash your urine bag regularly. To learn more, check out the [Spinal Cord Essentials Cleaning Your Urine Bag](#) handout.

### Possible Issues

Foley catheters can cause medical problems. If you have any of the following symptoms, get medical attention right away:

- Blood in the urine
- Pain
- Leaking from the sides

**Bladder infection:** One of the risks to using a Foley catheter is getting a bladder infection. To learn more, check out the [Spinal Cord Essentials Bladder Infections](#) handout.

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# Foley (Indwelling) Catheters

**Urine not draining:** If your bladder is not draining, check your tubing. There should be no bends or twists. Sometimes, adjusting your posture helps the catheter be in the right spot to drain. Mineral build up in the tubing can also cause poor drainage. If you can't find why your urine is not draining, seek medical attention right away.

**Genitals Scarring:** Foley catheters are often used for short time periods because they can scar the genitals. In extreme cases, men can have damage including splitting of the penis. If you notice signs of scarring, speak with your doctor.

**Kidney stones and cancer:** Using a Foley catheter long term has been linked with other medical issues. You can have an increased risk of kidney or bladder stones. Also, when using Foley catheter for more than 10 years, you increase your risk of bladder cancer. See your doctor regularly to have the right screening tests done. For more about this, check out the [Spinal Cord Essentials Staying Healthy](#) handout.

**Autonomic dysreflexia (AD):** Having a full bladder is a main cause of AD. AD can also be caused by a full bowel or skin issues. If you have a spinal cord injury at level T6 or above, you are at risk of AD. AD is a dangerous rise in blood pressure and is a **medical emergency**. If your blood pressure rises 20-40mmHg and you have symptoms, you have AD. You need to do something right away. If not treated, AD can cause stroke, seizures, and death. To learn more, check out the [Spinal Cord Essentials Autonomic Dysreflexia](#) handout.

If you have symptoms of AD because of your Foley catheter, seek medical attention right away. Symptoms include:

- Pounding headache
- Sweating or flushing of the face
- Goose bumps
- Increased muscle spasms
- Metallic taste in your mouth
- Feeling of anxiety
- Nasal congestion
- Blurred vision
- Seeing spots
- Nausea
- Difficulty breathing
- Slow heart rate

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