



Preventing a urinary tract infection (UTI) when you have a catheter

What is a urinary tract infection? (“UTI”)

The urinary tract includes the kidneys which make urine, the bladder which stores it, and the pathways which allows urine to flow from your kidneys and bladder to the outside of your body.

Germs do not normally live in any part of the urinary tract, but if germs enter it, an infection can occur.



What is a catheter, and how can it lead to a UTI?

A catheter is a thin rubber tube that can be inserted into your bladder. It is used to drain urine from the bladder. It may be removed immediately after the bladder is emptied, or it may be left in place for a longer period of time. If left in place, the catheter is connected to long tube that allows the urine to flow into a bag.

When a catheter is inserted or left in place, germs can enter your bladder by traveling on or through the catheter.

What are the symptoms of a UTI?

Symptoms may include one or more of these:

- Feeling the need to urinate often
- Burning or pain when you urinate
- Pain in the lower part of your belly
- Fever
- Cloudy or bloody urine (These may also have other causes).

Sometimes people with a catheter do not feel any symptoms. Sometimes symptoms are felt after the catheter is removed.

Can a UTI be treated?

Yes.

A UTI can be treated with antibiotics. If a catheter is in place, it may be removed or changed.

Your doctor will determine the best treatment for you.

How a UTI can be prevented when you have a catheter:

At MGH, your health care workers will:

- Use a catheter only when it is necessary, and remove it as soon as possible.
- Clean our hands and wear gloves before and after touching the catheter.
- Use sterile (“clean”) technique when the catheter is placed.
- Secure the catheter to your leg to prevent pulling of the catheter.
- Keep the drainage bag below the level of your bladder so that drained urine does not flow back into your bladder.
- Empty the bag regularly and make sure the drainage spout does not touch anything.

You can:

- Make sure all health care workers clean their hands before touching your catheter.
- Always wash your hands before and after touching your catheter.
- Try not to twist or fold the catheter or drainage tubing.
- Tell you doctor or nurse if you have any symptoms of a UTI.

This document has been reviewed for plain language by the staff of the Blum Center.