FAQs
(frequently asked questions)

about
"Catheter-Associated Urinary Tract Infection"

What is "catheter-associated urinary tract infection"?

A urinary tract infection (also called "UTI") is an infection in the urinary system, which includes the bladder (which stores the urine) and the kidneys (which filter the blood to make urine). Germs (for example, bacteria or yeasts) do not normally live in these areas; but if germs are introduced, an infection can occur.

If you have a urinary catheter, germs can travel along the catheter and cause an infection in your bladder or your kidney; in that case it is called a catheter-associated urinary tract infection (or "CA-UTI").

What is a urinary catheter?

A urinary catheter is a thin tube placed in the bladder to drain urine. Urine drains through the tube into a bag that collects the urine. A urinary catheter may be used:

- If you are not able to urinate on your own
- To measure the amount of urine that you make, for example, during intensive care
- During and after some types of surgery
- During some tests of the kidneys and bladder

People with urinary catheters have a much higher chance of getting a urinary tract infection than people who don't have a catheter.

How do I get a catheter-associated urinary tract infection (CA-UTI)?

If germs enter the urinary tract, they may cause an infection. Many of the germs that cause a catheter-associated urinary tract infection are common germs found in your intestines that do not usually cause an infection there. Germs can enter the urinary tract when the catheter is being put in or while the catheter remains in the bladder.

What are the symptoms of a urinary tract infection?

Some of the common symptoms of a urinary tract infection are:

- Burning or pain in the lower abdomen (that is, below the stomach)
- Fever
- Bloody urine may be a sign of infection, but is also caused by other problems
- Burning during urination or an increase in the frequency of urination after the catheter is removed.

Sometimes people with catheter-associated urinary tract infections do not have these symptoms of infection.

Can catheter-associated urinary tract infections be treated?

Yes, most catheter-associated urinary tract infections can be treated with antibiotics and removal or change of the catheter. Your doctor will determine which antibiotic is best for you.

What are some of the things that hospitals are doing to prevent catheter-associated urinary tract infections?

To prevent urinary tract infections, doctors and nurses take the following actions.

Catheter insertion

o Catheters are put in only when necessary and they are removed as soon as possible.

o Only properly trained persons insert catheters using sterile ("clean") technique.

o The skin in the area where the catheter will be inserted is cleaned before inserting the catheter.

o Other methods to drain the urine are sometimes used, such as

- External catheters in men (these look like condoms and are placed over the penis rather than into the penis)
- Putting a temporary catheter in to drain the urine and removing it right away. This is called intermittent urethral catheterization.

Catheter care

o Healthcare providers clean their hands by washing them with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand rub before and after touching your catheter.

If you do not see your providers clean their hands, please ask them to do so.

o Avoid disconnecting the catheter and drain tube. This helps to prevent germs from getting into the catheter tube.

o The catheter is secured to the leg to prevent pulling on the catheter.

o Avoid twisting or kinking the catheter.

o Keep the bag lower than the bladder to prevent urine from backflowing to the bladder.

o Empty the bag regularly. The drainage spout should not touch anything while emptying the bag.

What can I do to help prevent catheter-associated urinary tract infections if I have a catheter?

- Always clean your hands before and after doing catheter care.
- Always keep your urine bag below the level of your bladder.
- Do not tug or pull on the tubing.
- Do not twist or kink the catheter tubing.
- Ask your healthcare provider each day if you still need the catheter.

What do I need to do when I go home from the hospital?

- If you will be going home with a catheter, your doctor or nurse should explain everything you need to know about taking care of the catheter. Make sure you understand how to care for it before you leave the hospital.
- If you develop any of the symptoms of a urinary tract infection, such as burning or pain in the lower abdomen, fever, or an increase in the frequency of urination, contact your doctor or nurse immediately.
- Before you go home, make sure you know who to contact if you have questions or problems after you get home.

If you have questions, please ask your doctor or nurse.

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