Urinary Catheters and Urinary Tract Infections

What is a urinary catheter?
A urinary catheter (Foley catheter) is a small tube placed in your bladder to drain your urine. The tube connects to a bag that collects your urine. This may be used to help patients who are having trouble passing urine. You may have a catheter for a short time after surgery. The goal is to remove the catheter as soon as you do not need it.

When should a urinary catheter not be placed?
Urinary catheters should not be placed just because you cannot get out of bed. There are other options that can be used:
- Condom catheter
- Urinals (female and male)
- Toileting schedule
- Bedpan
- Incontinence pads
- Intermittent catheterization

A urinary catheter can keep you from getting out of bed and move around. Once your catheter is gone, your health care team will work with you to make sure you can get up safely.

Can a urinary catheter cause problems?
Yes. It can cause a urinary tract infection (UTI). This is because germs can use the catheter to get into your bladder and grow until they cause an infection. The longer the catheter is in place, the more time germs have to get in and grow, even if cared for properly.

A UTI is an infection in your kidneys, bladder, or other part of your urinary tract. Symptoms may include:
- Pain in the bladder area, lower back, or side of the body
- Sick feeling

A sample of your urine is taken to see if you have a UTI. While antibiotics can be used to treat these infections, some can become hard to treat and lead to a whole body infection.

Important things you and your healthcare team should know when you have a urinary catheter:
- Wash your hands before you handle the catheter or drainage bag.
- Make sure that the catheter is attached to one leg and not kinked.
- Always keep the catheter and drainage bag below the bladder and off the floor.
- Keep the catheter and drainage bag connected to keep out germs.
- Keep the catheter and the area around it clean.

Ask your doctor or nurse every day if the catheter can be removed.

Also keep in mind, the sooner the catheter comes out, the less chance you have of getting a UTI!

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright ©2/2015. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#7355