University College Hospital at Westmoreland Street

Urinary sheaths
Urology Directorate
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1 Introduction
This information leaflet is for men or their carers who want to know more about urinary sheaths and includes some tips to help you successfully use a urinary sheath.

2 What is a sheath?
Sheaths fit over the penis much like a contraceptive condom and collect urine as it drains out of the bladder through your waterpipe (Urethra). They are often also called condom catheters, uridoms, Texas catheters or external catheters. They are suitable for men with moderate/heavy incontinence. They can be connected to a drainage bag which can be worn on the thigh or the calf. Alternatively they can be connected to a catheter valve (which acts like a tap) instead of a bag. This can be useful when leakage is very light or for short term use during activities like sports, when other incontinence products are inappropriate.

Sheaths can be worn by men of all ages and when fitted properly work well and can protect from urine leakage better than pads. Men often prefer to use them in combination with other products, perhaps using a sheath in the day and a pad at night. During the day they are useful if you are active and want to go out for longer periods of time without access to a toilet e.g. long walks, playing golf etc. But they are also suitable for men in wheelchairs and those with a more sedentary lifestyle.

They tend not to work well if you have a short or retracted penis (common after prostate cancer treatment) and products designed specifically for this purpose may work better – you can ask your nurse specialist about these. There are many brands of sheath available made from different materials & available in a wide range of sizes.

3 Is a sheath suitable for me?
Before using sheaths for the first time we recommend that you seek advice from your nurse who should have expertise in fitting a sheath. You can also contact manufacturers directly as most have a helpline or specialist nurse advisor you can ask for advice and help.

A sheath is not recommended for some men for example if you do not empty your bladder properly.

If you are not able to put the sheath on by yourself it is possible to teach your partner or carer to apply this if they are willing to help.
4 Sizing

In order to work well, sheaths need to be the right size for the individual wearing them. Each manufacturer produces a product specific measuring gauge and it is important to measure the circumference of the penis correctly. If too large the sheath will be wrinkly and could fall off, and if too small it will be uncomfortable and cause irritation. To measure your size you should gently place the measuring device around the widest part of your penis (whilst flaccid).

Most sheaths usually come in standard or shorter lengths to enable the best fit. Once the correct size has been determined it is a good idea to ask for samples of different types of sheaths from the manufacturer or your nurse to ensure the best fit for you.

5 Skin preparation

If the sheath is to stay on effectively it is important that your skin is completely dry when you come to put it on. Wash your penis with a mild soap and rinse it well. Do not use a moisturizing soap, wet wipes or baby wipes as this will leave a residue on the skin and stop the sheath sticking to the skin.

You should wait for 10 minutes after a bath or shower before fitting your sheath. Some men wrap a piece of kitchen paper around the penis to completely absorb any residual moisture, especially after showering or bathing. Do not use talc or creams. If you need to use these products do so AFTER you have successfully fitted your sheath.

Do not shave your pubic hair as this can cause irritation. If necessary trim hair away from the base of your penis with blunt end scissors.

You may find that a specially designed skin preparation wipe or film may help the adhesive to stick and protect the skin but this is not essential. Your nurse will be able to advise you on how to obtain these should you need them.

Before placing the sheath use a hair guard to ensure that pubic hair is pushed away from the shaft. This is usually supplied by the company that makes the sheaths. If you do not have one then alternatively you can tear a hole in a paper towel and place the penis trough it up to the base to push the hair back out of the way. Once the sheath is in place the paper towel can be torn away.
6 Fitting the sheath

If you are uncircumcised ensure the foreskin is forward in a natural position covering the glans. You may need to extend the penis with one hand in order to roll on the sheath smoothly. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions for pulling the sheath over the penis (this varies from product to product). Most sheaths have adhesive on the inside so that once you roll them over the penis they will adhere to your skin thus keeping them in place.

The end of the sheath that fits over the tip of the penis is shaped like a funnel. Make sure you do not push the penis too far into the funnel and that you leave some room for urine to be able to drain into the funnel first before draining into the urine drainage bag you will attach to that end. Fitting the penis too tightly against the funnel will cause back flow of urine.

When the sheath is fully in place clasp your penis in your hand and hold for one minute. The warmth from your hand will improve the adhesive bond to your skin. A correctly fitting sheath should have a smooth finish on your penis – if there are wrinkles this may lead to leakage.

Attach your preferred drainage bag to the funnel end of the sheath. Ensure the tubing is well supported or anchored to prevent traction which may pull the sheath off. There are a number of drainage bag options and you should discuss this with your nurse.

7 How long can the sheath stay in place?

Wear time varies from individual to individual but most can stay in place for 24-48 hours. It is recommended that you change the sheath after 48 hours for hygiene reasons.

8 Removing the sheath

Use warm soapy water and a washcloth and gently roll off the sheath from the penis. If this is difficult or uncomfortable do it in the bath or shower or use a medical adhesive remover.
It is important to check your skin each time you change your sheath. Ensure there are no sore areas and wash and dry your skin properly before applying a new sheath.

Dispose of your used equipment in with the household rubbish.

9 Other tips

- There is a learning curve with applying these products – do not be deterred by early failure
- Urine will not drain up-hill so always keep the drainage bag lower than your bladder. Empty the drainage bag regularly so that it is not too heavy as this will pull on the sheath.
- Drink 8 – 10 glasses of fluid each day to help prevent you getting a urine infection
- If your skin becomes sore leave the sheath off for 24- 48 hours and do not reapply until the skin has improved.
- Always leave approximately 25mm between the end of your penis and the funnel when fitting it – this provides a small space to accommodate a sudden flow of urine and help it drain away
- If your sheath is fitted correctly you should not need a pad unless you need one because you have problems with your bowels. Sometimes wearing a pad or tight underwear can cause the sheath to leak as it may cut across the funnel section causing a blockage and urine will back flow and leak.

10 Where can I get a sheath?

Talk to your nurse specialist who may be able to fit you with a sheath, or refer you to a specialist who can help. Most manufacturers will also provide free samples for you to try. In the long term these are a prescription item so if you require this product you will need to get a prescription from your GP.

11 Where can I get further information?

These websites offer more information you may find useful:

https://www.continenceproductadvisor.org/products/maledevices/sheaths

http://www.healthtalk.org/people-experiences/long-term-conditions/living-urinary-catheter/condom-catheters
12 Contact details

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13 How to find us
14 Space for your notes: