

Urinary Sheaths

What is a sheath?

A sheath is a condom-like covering which fits over the penis and has an outlet tube. It connects to a drainage bag which collects urine (water) until it can be conveniently emptied.

When is a sheath useful?

Sheaths are used by men who are incontinent or who have difficulties in accessing toilets, eg those with mobility problems.

When is a sheath not of use?

A sheath will not help you pass urine if you are unable to empty your bladder. In order to use a sheath, the shaft of the penis needs to be at least 2.5 cm (1 inch) long. An alternative collection device may be a pubic pressure appliance (PPU).

Where can I get the sheaths from?

Sheaths can be prescribed for you by your GP or District Nurse. Chemists generally will have to order sheaths, so allow a few days for this to occur. Supplies may also be obtained from a prescription service and delivered to your home. Silicone products are available for those with latex allergies.

How do I get the correct size of sheath?

Sheaths come in different sizes and 18-40 mm diameters are available. Before you use a sheath for the first time a sizing gauge should be used to ensure the correct size is prescribed. It is important that the sheath is not too tight; room should be allowed for changes in the size of your penis.

How does the sheath stay in place?

There are several methods of keeping the sheath on. They include using a separate adhesive, an adhesive strip, an adhesive already applied to the sheath, or a strap around the outside. The wide choice ensures that there is something to suit most men.

Who puts the sheath on for me?

If you are able, you can put it on yourself. Alternatively, if your partner or carer is willing to help, they can be taught to apply it for you.

How do I put the sheath on?

1. Long pubic hairs should be trimmed (you do not have to shave)
2. Wash and thoroughly dry your penis to ensure adhesion.
3. Avoid powders or creams, as these will prevent the adhesive from sticking (unless prescribed).
4. If you are uncircumcised, make sure that the foreskin is in place over the head of the penis.
5. A 2-cm (3/4 inch) gap should be left between the tip of the penis and the sheath outlet so that the sheath fits comfortably. If the gap is too large, the sheath may twist or kink and could prevent the urine flow into the bag.
6. Unroll the entire sheath.

7. If an adhesive is used, the sheath must be firmly pressed to the penis in the area where the adhesive is, to obtain a good seal.
8. Attach a drainage bag to the outlet tube.

These are general points for applying a sheath. Please read the manufacturer's instructions that come with your sheath for specific details. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to ask your Continence or Urology Nurse Specialist.

How long will the sheath last?

A sheath can normally be left in place for 1-2 days between changes. However, for hygiene purposes you may prefer to change them daily.

How do I remove the sheath?

Use warm soapy water and roll it down the penis gently. Alternatively use a non alcohol based remover.

How do I care for the skin?

Apart from washing and drying thoroughly between changes, always check the skin carefully each time you remove the sheath. Using a barrier film can prevent skin problems. If you see any redness or are feeling sore, using a sheath with an adhesive strip to protect the skin may help or leave the sheath off until the skin returns to normal.

Will a sheath affect my sex life?

Using a sheath does not need to interfere with your sex life. Before having sex, simply remove the sheath and wash your penis. Afterwards you can put on your sheath as usual.

How should I dispose of the sheath?

Sheaths should be wrapped and placed in the dustbin.

What type of drainage bag do I need?

A leg bag is worn under your normal clothing during the day and emptied as required. A bag that is larger and can be attached to a stand may be used overnight when emptying the bag may be more difficult.

How do I wear a leg bag with a sheath system?

The leg bag is usually attached either to your thigh or to your calf with a pair of straps. Leg bags come in different sizes, holding 350 ml (3/4 pt) to 750 ml (1.5 pts). There are also different tube lengths, from 10 cm (4 inches) to 38 cm (15 inches). Your health care professional will help you choose the one that suits you best.

Emptying the bag

It is best not to let your bag get too full. To empty a leg bag, open the tap at the bottom and let it drain into the toilet if possible. If you find this difficult, you can use a container. Do not forget to close the tap again after you have emptied the bag, and always wash your hands.

What happens at night?

When you go to bed your leg bag can be replaced by a larger bag that can attach to a stand by the bed. Remember, urine cannot drain uphill, so always keep the bag lower than your bladder.

How often should I change the bag? How do I dispose of the bags?

The Department of Health recommends that a leg bag may be worn for a week before it needs changing. If it gets damaged, is difficult to empty or becomes uncomfortable to wear, you can change it sooner. If your bed bag has a drainage tap, it can be re-used for up to a week. Wash it through with water every morning and allow it to dry. (You can use a small funnel to pour water into the bag to help wash it through). If your bed bag does not have a tap, you must use a new bag each night. Empty and wash the bag before throwing it away in the dustbin.

How do I store the sheaths and bags?

It is important to store unused sheaths and bags in their original packaging in a dry, safe place away from direct heat and sunlight. For further information please contact CSH Surrey's Continence Service (contact details can be found on the webpage).