According to the Society of Urologic Nurses and Associates, Intermittent Self-Catheterization (ISC) is a safe and effective alternative method to empty the bladder. ISC is used to help protect the kidneys, prevent incontinence, and lessen the number of infections by promoting good drainage of the bladder while lowering pressure inside it. While self-catheterization is often done by UAB patients, they must take special precautions and should consult with a medical professional for additional advice.

The U.S. National Library of Medicine’s MedLine Plus service offers the following general instructions for self-catheterization:

**For Women:**

**Using Your Catheter**

Follow these steps to insert your catheter:

- Wash your hands well with soap and water.
- You may use disposable gloves, if you prefer not to use your bare hands. The gloves do not need to be sterile, just clean.
- Gently pull the labia open, and find the urinary opening. You can use a mirror to help you at first.
- Wash your labia three times, using a fresh antiseptic towelette or baby wipe each time. Or you may use cotton balls with mild soap and water. Rinse well and dry if you use soap and water. Wash the labia from front to back, up and down the middle, and on both sides.
- Get your container ready, or sit on the toilet.
- Apply the K-Y Jelly or other gel to the tip and top 2 inches of the catheter. (Some catheters come with gel already on them.)
- Gently slide the catheter up into your urethra until urine starts to flow. Do not force the catheter. Start over if it is not going in well. Try to relax and breathe deeply.
- Let the urine flow into the toilet or container. Bear down one or two times to empty all the urine from your bladder.
- When urine stops flowing, slowly remove the catheter. Pinch the end closed to avoid getting wet.
- Wipe around your urinary opening and labia again with a towelette, baby wipe, or cotton ball.
- If you are using a container to collect urine, empty it into the toilet. Always close the toilet lid before flushing to prevent germs from spreading.
- Wash your hands with soap and water.

**Single-Use Catheters**

- While some catheters are designed to be reused after thorough cleaning, for most
patients single-use disposable catheters work best.

**When to Call the Doctor**

Call your doctor or nurse if:
- You are having trouble inserting or cleaning your catheter.
- You are leaking urine.
- You have a skin rash or sores.
- You notice a smell.
- You have increased pelvic pain or signs of infection (a burning sensation when you urinate, fever, or chills).

For additional guidance on female self-catheterization we recommend this educational video provided by The National Association For Continence (NAFC)

For additional information about the NAFC go to [www.nafc.org](http://www.nafc.org)

**For Men:**

**Using Your Catheter**

Follow these steps to insert your catheter:
- Wash your hands well with soap and water.
- You may use disposable gloves if you prefer not to use your bare hands. Ask your doctor or nurse if the gloves need to be sterile.
- Move back the foreskin of your penis if you are uncircumcised.
- Wash the tip of your penis with Betadine (an antiseptic cleaner), soap and water, or baby wipes the way your doctor or nurse showed you.
- Get your urine container ready or sit on the toilet.
- Apply the K-Y jelly or other gel to the tip and top 2 inches of the catheter. (Some catheters come with gel already on them.)
- Hold your penis straight out and insert the catheter using firm, gentle pressure. Do not force it. Start over if it is not going in well. Try to relax and breathe deeply.
- Once the catheter is in, urine will start to flow.
- After urine starts to flow, gently push in the catheter about 2 more inches, or to the “Y” connector. (Younger boys will push in the catheter only about 1 inch more at this point.)
- Let the urine drain into the toilet or special container. Bear down one or two times to empty all the urine from your bladder.
- When urine stops, slowly remove the catheter. Pinch the end closed to avoid getting wet.
- Wash the end of your penis with a clean cloth or baby wipe. Make sure the foreskin is back in place.
- If you are using a container to collect urine, empty it into the toilet. Always close the toilet
lid before flushing to prevent germs from spreading.
- Wash your hands with soap and water.

**Single-Use Catheters**

- While some catheters are designed to be reused after thorough cleaning, for most patients single-use disposable catheters work best.

**When to Call the Doctor**
Call your doctor or nurse if:
- You are having trouble inserting or cleaning your catheter.
- You are leaking urine.
- You have a skin rash or sores.
- You notice a smell.
- You have increased or new penis pain.
- You have signs of infection (a burning sensation when you urinate, fever, or chills).

Source: Adapted with modifications for UAB patients from [ICA Update, Spring 2012](https://www.icaupdate.com) and [MedLine Plus, U.S. National Library of Medicine](https://medlineplus.gov). A fact sheet with additional details can be downloaded from the [Society of Urologic Nurses and Associates website](https://souan.org).