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Feature Article



Male External Catheters and Skin Health



Identify: Choosing the Right Male External Catheter

Male external catheters (MECs) are used by men with temporary to chronic urinary incontinence as a better lifestyle alternative to invasive indwelling Foley catheters or incontinence products such as liners, pull-ups and diapers. Some indications for use are prostatectomy recovery, reflexive voiding due to spinal cord injuries, decreased mobility and unmanageable urinary frequency or urgency.

The most popular male external catheters are self-adhesive latex and silicone that can be used up to 24 hours or more before replacing. MECs should be removed daily for cleansing and skin inspection. To differing degrees, all MECs allow for moisture vapor to pass through, helping the skin to stay dry and healthy.

Latex and Silicone Self-Adhesive MECs

Latex is a natural rubber material which is very soft and flexible. Silicone is a synthetic compound with rubber-type characteristics that is proven to be useful for medical applications. Self-adhesives used in Latex and Silicone MEC's secure and bind well to human skin. Compared to old-fashioned MECs held on with foam tape, the binding properties of the self-adhesives decrease the chances of it coming off and provide for a more comfortable fit.

Sizing Importance

Sizing is important to prevent leakage and/or skin damage. Leakage may result if the catheter is too loose, but constriction may occur if too tight. MECs are flexible and offer a snug but not overly tight fit. To get the right fit, measure the circumference of the penis with a size guide or metric measuring tape. The penis should be measured in its relaxed flaccid state at the widest spot.

If the measurement ranges between two sizes, the smaller sized MEC will most often be more comfortable and work better. The larger of the two sizes may become loose and come off or allow urine leakage leading to skin damage and complications over time. Conversely, a size that is too small and tight can cause constriction, restriction of blood flow or obstruction. It may take some trial and error to find the size that works best.

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Resolve: Treating Common Skin Complications



Complications with male external catheters are commonly caused by user error and include: allergic reactions, redness, itching, swelling, skin tears, maceration (softening of the skin tissue when soaked in liquid), loss of oxygen to the tissue, a buildup of bacteria or a urinary tract infection.

Treatment of Latex Skin Allergy

Any sort of rash or infection with unknown causes deserves medical attention by a health care provider. An examination by a licensed medical professional will help determine whether the reaction is due to latex allergy or another cause. Latex allergies can come on as delayed hypersensitivity, which is most often seen as a rash where latex has touched skin.

There are no procedures to desensitize people with latex allergies. Treatments of latex allergy reactions include the use of antihistamines, adrenaline, and steroids.

Treatment of Skin Tissue Complications

When skin complications occur, it is important to correct them before more serious skin problems arise. As with any complication, it is best to consult a healthcare professional for advice. For minor issues such as redness, itching or swelling, it is suggested to stop using MECs until the skin returns to its normal state. This same course of action for a longer period of time is recommended for maceration and loss of oxygen to the tissue. If the patient and/or doctor has decided to stop using male external catheters until the skin is fully healed, Foley catheters or incontinence products such as pull-ups or male guards can be used in the meantime. If skin tearing occurs, consult a physician immediately for treatment and a treatment plan.



Prevent: Preventing Skin Damage from Male External Catheters

The best way to prevent skin damage when using male external catheters is to use them properly. There are basic guidelines for preparation, application and removal that can be followed to best preserve the skin and prevent complications.

1

Preparation

Reduce the amount of pubic hair that will interfere with the application of the MEC or use a hair guard. It is recommended to trim pubic hair instead of shaving to avoid skin irritation and accidents. Avoid the use of moisture barrier creams and all other ointments that may interfere with the MEC's adhesive. Wash the penis thoroughly with soap and water, being careful not to get soap inside the penis which can cause irritation or pain. Dry completely before proceeding to apply a new MEC.

2

Application

Proper application of the male external catheter will prevent problems that may lead to skin damage. Washing hands thoroughly before application helps to reduce the risk of urinary tract infections. When applying the MEC, leave a small space between the drainage port and the tip of the penis to allow for changes in size.

3

Removal

Apply a warm, wet washcloth to the outside surface of the MEC for easier, gentle removal. After detaching the MEC from the urine collection system, carefully roll the catheter off and inspect skin for irritation. Cleanse thoroughly with soap and water.

Urology Diagnosis Focus: Spina Bifida



For patients with spina bifida, bladder problems are common and typically result in a need for urological or incontinence supplies. The information below is a general overview for a better understanding of the needs of patients with spina bifida.

Generally, in spina bifida, the small bones of the vertebrae that make up the spine don't form fully and may have gaps between them. In severe cases, one or more vertebrae may be missing, thus exposing the spinal cord. In most spina bifida cases, the spinal defect is located toward the base of the spine. Approximately 5 out of 10,000 live births in the United States are affected.

Complications range from minor physical problems with little functional impairment to severe physical and mental disabilities, including abnormal sensation and paralysis. Spina bifida's impact is determined by the size, location and severity of the malformation. All nerves below the malformation are affected to some degree. Therefore, the higher the malformation is on the back, the greater the nerve damage and loss of muscle function and sensation.

Types of spina bifida



Occulta

Spina bifida occulta is the least serious and most common type. It is usually discovered only on x-rays or scans. Most people never become aware of their condition.



Meningocele

In the next most serious type, meningocele the coverings of the spinal cord (meninges) pass back through the opening in the spine to form a cyst-like swelling.



Myelomeningocele

If the spinal cord is enclosed in the cyst the condition is called myelomeningocele. This is the most serious type of spina bifida.

Because the type and degree of spina bifida varies from person to person, the needs of the individual will depend on his or her unique challenges. With spina bifida, damage to nerves in the lower lumbar and sacral region in the spine will occur over time and can lead to a condition known as neurogenic bladder.

A neurogenic bladder causes incontinence ranging from partial to complete loss of voluntary urination. Intermittent catheters and/or incontinence products can be used by those with spina bifida to manage a neurogenic bladder and assist in gaining and maintaining independence.

Shield HealthCare Patient Success Story
[Meet 7-year-old Kumaka](#) →

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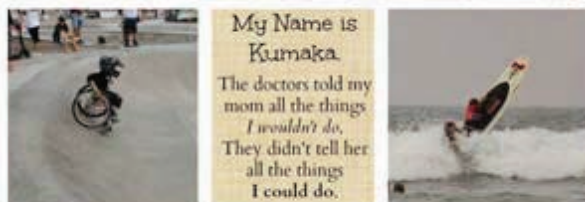
Shield HealthCare Patient Success Story



Life Beyond Spina Bifida: Meet Kumaka

A day in the life of 7-year-old Kumaka is full of adventure and limitless activity. Although he was born with Spina Bifida, his philosophy is “I am not different from any other kid. My wheelchair does not stop me from doing what I want to do.” And what exactly does Kumaka like to do? More than his parents ever imagined!

Kumaka is an amazing athlete with an impressive portfolio, including wheelchair skateboarding, basketball, tennis, WCMX, track, surfing and so much more! The Challenged Athletes Foundation (CAF) granted Kumaka a racing wheelchair in April 2014 to further develop his athletic ability.



Thanks to the Make-A-Wish Foundation, Kumaka and his family experienced a week's vacation to Walt Disney World last year. The entire family, including Kumaka's 4 big brothers experienced the magic and wonder that dreams are made of. It's no surprise Kumaka shares his amazing life via social media, as a beacon of hope and shining example of determination beyond limits.

Words cannot express what an inspiration Kumaka is to all of us at Shield HealthCare and we are truly honored to be his home medical supply resource, providing him the products he needs to live life to the fullest.

“I am learning to live
beyond my wheelchair.”

-Kumaka J.

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