



Introduction

Around 70,000 people in the UK rely on intermittent catheters (plastic tubes) to empty their bladder. In the past, users cleaned and reused these catheters. Today, only sterile, single-use catheters are provided. These single-use options are costly and create more waste. Also, it is uncertain that they are better than reusable ones in preventing urine infection or improving quality of life.

To find out if using reusable catheters causes more urinary tract infection than only using single-use catheters, we did a clinical trial. In the trial we compared use of reusable and single-use catheters combined (we call this mixed use) with use of only single-use catheters.

What did the trial involve?

- 578 intermittent catheter users from England, Scotland and Wales.
- Half used reusable and single-use catheters (mixed-use) for 12 months (the intervention group).
- Half used only their usual single-use catheters (single-use) for 12 months (the control group).
- Computer software randomly decided which group each person was put in.

What did the participants do?

- Intervention group participants used the trial reusable catheter for at least one catheterisation per day and as often as they wished either at home or when away from home.
- They used their usual single-use catheters for other catheterisations.
- After each use, cleaned the reusable catheter using soapy water and a 15-minute soak in Milton solution.
- Control group participants used their usual single-use catheters for all catheterisations.

Each month all participants told us about their experiences during the previous month including:

- Any signs or symptoms of urinary tract infection they had
- Any actions they took including sending us a urine sample and taking antibiotics.
- Any difficulties they had with their catheters, for example, when inserting or removing them.

What did we find in the trial?

People who used the reusable catheter:

- Did not have more urine infections.
- Used fewer antibiotics.
- Had similar quality of life.
- Used a reusable catheter more than two-thirds of the time.
- Used (threw away) about 900 fewer single-use catheters saving around £1,330 per person.
- Mostly wanted to continue using reusable catheters and single-use ones after the trial.
- Mostly thought the NHS should provide reusable and single-use catheters for patient choice.

But some participants found the reusable catheters provided were unacceptable or cleaning them too much effort and stopped using them in the trial.

What can we conclude from these results?

- Reusable catheters do not cause more urine infections than single-use ones.
- They are acceptable for many but not all catheter users.
- The NHS should offer reusable catheters as an option as well as single-use ones.
- Catheter users should be able to choose if and when they use reusable catheters.