Retrograde ureteric stenting

Information for patients from the Urology Department

This leaflet is not meant to replace the information discussed between you and your doctor, but can act as a starting point for such a discussion or as a useful reminder of the key points.

**What is a ureteric stent?**
Urine is produced by your kidneys. From here it drains through a narrow tube, the ureter, into your bladder. A ureteric stent is a thin plastic tube placed in your ureter to allow urine to drain freely from your kidney to your bladder (see diagram). The average length of a stent placed in adults is 24 to 30cm long.

**Why do I need a ureteric stent?**
A ureteric stent is for patients in whom there is an obstruction to the flow of urine from the kidney to the bladder, or in whom an obstruction is very likely to occur.

Obstruction may be caused by a kidney stone, a fragment of stone after shock wave treatment to a stone, a narrowing (stricture) along the ureter due to scarring/growth, or even due to an enlarged prostate. Your doctor will explain more about the reasons for your stent at the time of your consultation.

Obstruction in your ureter leads to unwanted pressure build-up in your kidneys. This affects the way your kidneys work and may eventually cause permanent kidney damage. Obstructing the flow of urine also makes you more likely to get an infection which can lead to kidney damage. It is therefore important that any evidence suggesting kidney obstruction is dealt with quickly.
**Will I have to stay in hospital?**
You do not need to stay in hospital unless the reason for the stent insertion needs you to do so. If you do need to stay, the reason for this will be explained to you.

**Are there any alternatives?**
Other options include a tube lying outside the body, or more complex surgery to unblock the kidney, but these options will be discussed with you by your doctor if appropriate.

**How long is the stent left inside?**
Ureteric stents are usually placed temporarily to allow free drainage of urine through the stent from your kidney to your bladder. Stents can be left in for a couple days, weeks, or even months during which time the original cause of the obstruction will be dealt with.

If you need to have a stent for longer than a few months, you will be asked by your doctor to come in for a stent change. In this case, the old stent will be taken out and a new one put in.

The overall time a stent stays inside depends on individual conditions. This will be discussed with you in detail by your doctor.

**How is a retrograde ureteric stent put in?**
This procedure is usually performed under general anaesthesia (you will be asleep).

A special telescope (cystoscope) is passed through your water passage (urethra) into your bladder where the openings of your ureters can be identified. With the help of x-rays the stent is then passed up over a guide wire through your ureter until it lodges in your kidney. Once the guide wire is removed, both ends of the stent coil, preventing it from becoming displaced.

**Will I feel the stent inside me?**
The stent is flexible and adjusts to the movement of your body. They are designed for you to lead as normal a life as possible. However, while some people are able to tolerate them very well others suffer from what we call 'stent symptoms' and are aware of the stent at most times (see next page).
What are stent symptoms?
In the majority of cases stent symptoms are tolerable. In extreme cases the symptoms are intolerable and the stent may have to be removed.

Most symptoms are caused by the stent irritating its surrounding area. It may be likened to a ‘foreign’ material that your body is trying to squeeze out along with the urine!

Symptoms include the following:

• blood stained urine; this improves by drinking plenty of water
• feeling the need to pass urine very frequently but often with only small amounts of urine passed
• feeling the need to get to the toilet urgently
• dull pain/ache/discomfort along your back, in your groin, or even in your genitalia on the side of the stent; and
• incontinence, but this is rare.

The majority of these symptoms improve and settle with time. You are encouraged to drink plenty of water and to take painkillers (such as paracetamol) if necessary.

If your symptoms get worse, you develop a fever, or you are at all concerned, please speak to your doctor as soon as possible.

Are there any complications to having a stent?
Ureteric stenting is a very safe procedure but there are complications that can arise.

• The nature of obstruction may mean that your surgeon is unable to place the stent satisfactorily inside your ureter. Should this happen your doctor will discuss with you other methods of relieving the obstruction.

• Occasionally, when the stent has been in place for a while, there is a possibility that hard debris may deposit on its surface. This makes the stent stiff and its removal more difficult, which can lead to the use of lasers or shock waves to break up the crystals. For this reason it is important that you drink two to three litres of fluids each day and make sure that you have received a date for the removal/change of your stent.

• You may develop a fever or burning sensation when passing urine suggesting you have developed an infection. This is easily treated with a course of antibiotics but it is important that you contact your doctor as soon as you start to feel unwell.

What precautions should I take with daily activities, work, and sports?
Other than the things already mentioned above, your stent should not stop your day to day activities. You can carry on with work and sport as normal so long as the underlying kidney condition and your general health allow you to do so. However, if your work/sport involves strenuous physical activity you may experience some discomfort and notice that your urine has become blood stained. This should settle by itself.
Can I travel?
It is possible to travel with a stent so long as your general health allows it. If you are planning a holiday the possibility of needing to ask for medical attention should be kept in mind.

For further information
If you have any further queries, please speak to your doctor or consultant.

Useful contact numbers
If you have any questions or concerns about your stent please telephone the Kent and Canterbury Hospital switchboard on 01227 766877 and ask to speak to your consultant’s secretary.

Follow-up:
My consultant: ________________________________

Date of stent placement: _______________ [ ] right [ ] left

Stent change/removal: _______________ weeks/months
   date: ____________________
   location: Kent and Canterbury Hospital, Canterbury

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If you would like this information in another language, audio, Braille, Easy Read, or large print please ask a member of staff.

Any complaints, comments, concerns, or compliments please speak to your doctor or nurse, or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01227 783145 or 01227 864314, or email ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net

Further patient leaflets are available via the East Kent Hospitals web site www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patientinformation