

How to Empty Your Surgical Drain

To ensure your recovery from surgery is comfortable and complication free, it's key that you use your surgical drain correctly, while at the same time taking steps to prevent infection. There are several different kinds of surgical drains, but no matter what type of drain you have, all drains must be emptied on a regular basis. This is very important and is a regular part of daily care.

Empty your drain when it is half full, usually every 8 to 12 hours. To empty it, always follow the specific instructions for your type of drain, but here are some general things to keep in mind. Gather your supplies. These should include: alcohol wipes and a notepad to write down your fluid measurements.

Do everything you can to prevent infection. Your healthcare provider may tell you to wear gloves when caring for your drain. If not, wash your hands thoroughly using soap and warm water or an alcohol based hand sanitizer.

You may be told to 'milk' or 'strip' the tube. Using your forefinger and thumb, push any fluid that is in the tube down into the bulb. Once all the fluid is in the bulb, note the amount of fluid by looking at the lines on the side of your collection device or carefully pour the fluid into a measuring container and note the amount.

Then, empty the fluid into the toilet making sure no part of your drain touches the toilet and clean the plug or stopper with an alcohol swab. Let it air dry. Next, if your drain works with suction, squeeze the bulb until it is flat. This creates the suction needed to drain the fluid properly. Put the plug or stopper back into the bulb, making sure it stays flat. Wash your hands again, thoroughly.

Write down the amount of fluid you collected in your log book and note the color. At first the fluid will be bloody. As you heal, the fluid will turn to light pink, then light yellow and finally clear. And as you heal, the amount of fluid you collect should decrease.

If the amount increases or looks bloodier than the last time you emptied your drain, call your healthcare provider. If you have any questions about emptying your drain, contact your healthcare provider. And don't be afraid to have a 'cheat sheet' close by, just in case you need it. Eventually, with time and practice, emptying your drain will become second nature to you.