

Patient *education*

Your bulb drain

What is a bulb drain?

A bulb drain is a thin rubber tube and soft, round bulb that creates a gentle suction.

How is it used?

The rubber tube is placed in the area where you had surgery. A bulb is attached to the end of the tube that is outside your body.

What does it do?

The bulb drain removes excess fluid that builds up in your incision. The color and amount of fluid varies. Right after surgery, the fluid is bright red and a little thicker than water. As you heal, the fluid may become yellow or pink and thinner, like water.

What daily care is needed?

- Keep the bulb flat (compressed) at all times, except when you empty it. Flatten the bulb by squeezing it firmly in the middle and closing the cap. This creates suction.
- Use tape to secure the tube 1-2 inches below the insertion sites to keep it from pulling on your stitches. The tube is stitched in place and will not slip out.
- Secure the bulb as directed by your health care provider.
- Keep the area where the tube enters your wound dry and covered with a bandage.
- Empty the bulb whenever it is half full. If it becomes too full, the bulb can't create enough suction, and it could overflow.
- Empty the bulb at the same time every day after the amount of fluid decreases.

How do I empty the bulb?

Before you begin, you will need a measuring cup, paper, and a pen or pencil.

- Wash your hands.
- Run your fingers gently down the tube to empty any remaining fluid into the bulb.
- Open the bulb cap to release suction. Do not touch the inside of the cap.
- Holding the cap out of the way, pour fluid into the measuring cup.
- Squeeze the middle of the bulb firmly and replace the cap.

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- Check the tape to make sure it is attached securely to your skin. If not, apply a new piece.
- Pin the bulb to your clothing.
- Write down the amount of fluid from each bulb and the date and time. If there are two bulbs, note the amount of drainage from each bulb and keep the totals separate.
- Add up the amount removed in 24 hours.
- Flush the fluid down the toilet.
- Wash your hands.

When there is less than 2 tablespoons of fluid in a 24 hour period, call your health care provider.

If there is drainage around the tube site, change the dressing and keep the area dry. Cleanse around the tube with sterile saline and place a dry gauze around the site. This gauze should be changed when soiled. If it stays clean, and unsoiled, it should still be changed daily.

Call your doctor if:

- The fluid has a bad smell or is cloudy.
- You have a fever.
- The amount of fluid is increasing.
- The tube fell out.
- You have redness or swelling around the tube site.
- You have drainage from a surgical wound.
- The bulb drain will not stay flat after you empty it.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.

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