

How to Care for the Jackson-Pratt Drain

The Jackson-Pratt (JP) drain is a special tube that prevents body fluid from collecting near the site of your surgery. The drain pulls this fluid (by suction) into a bulb. The bulb can then be emptied and the fluid inside measured.

At first, this fluid is bloody. Then, as your wound heals, the fluid changes to light pink, light yellow, or clear. The drain will stay in place until less than 30 cc (about 2 tablespoons) of fluid can be collected in a 24-hour period.

Caring for the JP drain is easy. Depending on how much fluid drains from your surgical site, you will need to empty the bulb every 8 to 12 hours. The bulb should be emptied when it is half full. Before you are discharged from the hospital, your nurse will show you how to:

- ▶ kink the tubing to prevent reflux
- ▶ empty the collection bulb
- ▶ record the amount of fluid collected
- ▶ squeeze the bulb flat and plug so that the suction works again
- ▶ release the tubing and check free flow
- ▶ keep the drain site clean and free of infection

How to empty the drain

1. Wash your hands well with soap and water.
2. Kink the tubing just above the bulb
3. Pull the plug out of the bulb.
4. Pour the fluid inside the bulb into a measuring cup, or measure fluid against markings on the bulb before emptying.
5. Clean the plug with alcohol. Then squeeze the bulb flat. While the bulb is flat, put the plug back into the bulb. The bulb should stay flat after it is plugged so that the vacuum suction can restart. If you can't squeeze the bulb flat and plug it at the same time, use a hard, flat surface (such as a table) to help you press the bulb flat while you replug it.
6. Release the kink and check free flow
7. Measure how much fluid you collected. Write the amount of drainage, and the date and time you collected it, on the JP drainage chart at the end of this document.
8. Flush the fluid down the toilet.
9. Wash your hands.

Complications

Sometimes, a large amount of fluid may leak from around the drain site, making the gauze dressing completely wet. If this happens, use soap and water to clean the area. Verify that the bulb drain is secured and “flat” to provide the needed suction.

Another potential side effect is the development of a clot within the drain. This appears as a dark, stringy lining. It could prevent the drainage from flowing through the tube.

Be sure to notify your doctor if either of these complications occurs.

How to check for infection

Watch the skin around the drain for these signs of infection:

- ▶ increased redness
- ▶ increased pain
- ▶ increased swelling

Other signs of infection:

- ▶ fever greater than 101 °F
- ▶ cloudy yellow, tan, or foul-smelling drainage

Report any of these symptoms to your doctor as soon as possible.

If you have questions, please call your doctor.

