



Stadium Pal

an essay by David Sedaris

It was my search for something discreet, masculine, and practical that led me to the Stadium Pal, an external catheter currently being marketed to sports fans, truck drivers, and anyone else who's tired of searching for a bathroom. At first inspection, the device met all my criteria. Was it masculine? Yes, and proudly so. Knowing that no sensible female would ever voluntarily choose to pee in her pants, the manufacturers went ahead and designed the product exclusively for men.

Unlike a regular catheter, which is inserted directly into the penis, the Stadium Pal connects by way of a self-adhesive condom, which is then attached to a flexible plastic tube. Urine flows through the tube and collects in the "Freedom Leg Bag," conveniently strapped to the user's calf. The bag can be emptied and reused up to twelve times, making it both disgusting and cost-effective. Was it discreet? According to the brochure, unless you wore it with shorts, no one needed to know anything about it. Was it practical? At the time, yes. I don't drive or attend football games, but I did have a book tour coming up, and the possibilities were endless. Five glasses of iced tea followed by a long public reading? Thanks, Stadium Pal. The window seat on an overbooked cross-country flight? Don't mind if I do!

I ordered myself a Stadium Pal and soon realized that, while it might make sense in a hospital, it really wasn't very practical for day-to-day use. In an open-air sporting arena, a piping-hot thirty-four-ounce bag of urine might go unnoticed, but not so in a stuffy airplane or a small, crowded bookstore. An hour after christening it, I smelled like a nursing home. On top of that, I found that it was hard to pee and do other things at the same time. Reading out loud, discussing my dinner options with the flight attendant, checking into a fine hotel: Each activity required its own separate form of concentration, and while no one knew exactly what I was up to, it was pretty clear that something was going on. I think it was my face that gave me away. That and my oddly swollen calf.

What ultimately did me in was the self-adhesive condom. Putting it on was no problem, but its removal qualified as what, in certain cultures, is known as a bris. Wear it once and you'll need a solid month in order to fully recover. It will likely be a month in which you'll weigh the relative freedom of peeing in your pants against the unsightly discomfort of a scab-covered penis, ultimately realizing that, in terms of a convenient accessory, you're better off with a new watchband.

Originally published in Esquire Magazine