

Living with Bladder Cancer - A Quick Guide



Contents

This is a brief summary of the information on 'Living with bladder cancer' from CancerHelp UK. You will find more detailed information on the website.

In this information there are sections on

- Coping with bladder cancer
- Life after bladder surgery
- Your sex life and bladder cancer
- What to ask your doctor
- Bladder cancer organisations

Coping with bladder cancer

It can be very difficult coping with a diagnosis of cancer, both practically and emotionally. You are likely to be feeling very confused and upset at first. As well as coping with the fear and anxiety that a diagnosis of cancer brings, you have to work out how to manage practically. The CancerHelp UK coping with cancer section contains lots of information you may find helpful. There are sections on

- Your feelings
- Talking to people: who and what to tell
- Talking to children
- How you can help yourself
- Who else can help you

- Financial support including Government benefits and charity grants

Life after bladder surgery

Living with a urostomy or continent urinary diversion

It may take some time to get used to having a stoma. There are the practical things to learn. For example changing your urostomy bags or self catheterising and irrigating your stoma. But there is also the change in your body to come to terms with. If you find this particularly difficult, you could contact one of the bladder cancer organisations.

Job, sports and hobbies

Unless you do heavy manual work, your surgery should not make any difference to your job. Ask your stoma nurse if you are unsure. Your urostomy will not stop you enjoying your favourite pastimes. Exercise and swimming are possible. Once again, your stoma nurse can give you advice.

Your relationships

It is very likely that you will feel worried about how the stoma will affect your relationships. These can be practical worries about the bag being noticeable or leaking. Or emotional worries about how your friends or partner will react. If you are able



to talk openly with close friends and family about your surgery, you will probably find that these worries may lessen or disappear.

Living with bladder reconstruction

There are really very few things you can't do. If you lift something really heavy, you may find that your bladder leaks. You will find out by trial and error which activities cause problems.

Changing your urostomy bag

There are different types of urostomy bag, so we can't give you detailed information about how to change it here. Your stoma nurse will show you how to change your bag. It is helpful to keep everything you need in a bag or in one place. That way, you won't discover that something is missing half way through.

You don't have to keep anything sterile (completely free from all germs) for a bag change. But it's important to be hygienic so do wash your hands before and after. It's also important to look after your stoma and the skin round it. As part of each bag change, you'll need to wash and dry your skin thoroughly.

Self catheterising and irrigating your continent urinary diversion

If you have a continent urinary diversion pouch, you will need to learn how to empty and irrigate it. A catheter is the medical name for a tube. So catheterising just means putting in a tube to drain out your urine. Irrigating the pouch means washing out the inside of it.

You will begin catheterising and irrigating after the pouch made during your surgery has healed. This is normally 2 to 3 weeks

after your operation. Your stoma nurse will show you how to do it.

You don't have to keep everything sterile when you drain your urine. But it's important to be as clean as possible to avoid getting an infection.

To start with, you will need to empty the pouch every 2 hours or so. As the pouch stretches, you will be able to cut this down to every 4 to 6 hours during the day. Your stoma nurse will advise on how often to irrigate, as this can vary.

Your sex life and bladder cancer

For men

If you have your bladder removed, your prostate will be removed as well. During this operation the nerves that control erection can be damaged. This means you may not be able to get an erection after your operation. Having your prostate removed also means you cannot ejaculate, so your orgasms will be dry. Radiotherapy can also cause erection problems for some men.

There are several options to help you get an erection. Drugs such as sildenafil (Viagra) or other similar drugs. There are also injections or pellets that go into the penis itself. Another alternative is a vacuum pump that draws blood into the penis to stiffen it. Talk to your doctor or specialist nurse if you would like to try any of these.

For women

Often the operation to remove your urethra can shorten or narrow your vagina. Talk to your surgeon beforehand if this is a



concern for you. Radiotherapy can sometimes cause vaginal dryness. There are gels and creams available to help reduce vaginal dryness. Your specialist nurse should be able to advise you about this.

What to ask your doctor about living with bladder cancer

- Where can I get help dealing with my feelings?
- Do I have to pay for counselling?
- Who can answer any questions I have about living with my urostomy/continent urinary diversion/bladder reconstruction?
- How do I get the equipment I need to manage my urostomy/continent urinary diversion?
- Do I have to pay for any of it?
- When can I go back to work?
- Can I take up my usual sports, hobbies and activities again?
- Is there anyone I can talk to about the effect of treatment on my sex life?
- Can my partner come too?
- What practical help is available?
- Can I get help with money?
- Do you think I could claim industrial injury benefit?
- Can anyone help me with claiming benefits?

Bladder cancer organisations

Cancer Research UK
 Main website: www.cancerresearchuk.org
 Patient information website:
<http://cancerhelp.cancerresearchuk.org>
 Cancer Information Nurses phone: 0808 800 4040

The Urostomy Association
 Tel: 01889 563191
 Email: secretary.ua@classmail.co.uk
 Website: www.uagbi.org

More information

For more information about bladder cancer, visit our website <http://cancerhelp.cancerresearchuk.org>

You will find a wide range of detailed, up to date information for people affected by cancer, including a clinical trials database that you can search for trials in the UK. You can view or print the information in a larger size if you need to.

For answers to your questions about cancer call our Cancer Information Nurses on **0808 800 4040** 9am till 5pm Monday to Friday

Adapted from Cancer Research UK's Patient Information Website CancerHelp UK in February 2012. CancerHelp UK is not designed to provide medical advice or professional services and is intended to be for educational use only. The information provided through CancerHelp UK and our nurse team is not a substitute for professional care and should not be used for diagnosing or treating a health problem or disease. If you have, or suspect you may have, a health problem you should consult your doctor. © Cancer Research UK 2012. Cancer Research UK is a registered charity in England and Wales (1089464) and in Scotland (SC041666).