Throughout the world, neobladders are the main alternative to having a stoma with a bag attached to your abdomen.

What actually happens

This is a major operation where a type of bladder reconstruction is performed. A piece of your bowel (larger than that used to make a stoma) is cut out, and the remaining bowel sewn back together again. The section of bowel that has been removed is opened lengthways and then stitched together to make a new ‘bladder’. This is then joined to your ureters (the pipes that bring your wee down from your kidneys to your bladder). This new bladder, the neobladder, is then connected to your urethra, so that your wee is expelled through the normal route.

The muscles of your neobladder will not work in the same way as in a normal bladder. Initially, you will not have complete control of the new bladder, so you will be shown how to do pelvic floor exercises to strengthen your muscles. It is quite common to have some incontinence in the early days following surgery, especially at night. After surgery, the capacity of your neobladder will be limited.

Some surgeons favour this option, whilst others are quite happy to advise both neobladders and stomas. Many people are suited to a neobladder operation but others aren’t. Do talk to your consultant about what is right for you. Before a final decision is made, there will need to be tests and scans to make sure that a neobladder is the best option for you. Sometimes during surgery it may become apparent that the neobladder is not going to work for you – and in these special cases the surgeon will substitute a stoma and ileal conduit. Your consultant will explain all this before your operation.

The first ever neobladder operation was performed in 1959, so surgeons have a lot of experience performing this procedure.

fightbladdercancer.co.uk
so you will need to set an alarm to wake yourself up at night in order to go to the loo before it becomes too full.

It will take between 3 and 6 months post surgery for your neobladder to stretch to the same size as a normal bladder. You will probably need to empty it every 1 to 3 hours to start with, and then gradually build up the time between loo visits as your neobladder stretches and you get used to the new sensations.

This surgery is a major undertaking and it is likely that you will need to stay in hospital for 2 to 3 weeks. Your urology team will keep a close eye on you to make sure that no complications occur. You will be given lots of fluids through a drip until you are able to drink enough normally. Make sure you get enough pain relief – if it’s not working, ask for some more. Do not suffer in silence.

Your consultant should provide you with all the information you need to know about your operation. If you are not clear on something, do ask. Make sure you know about all the permanent changes to your body as well as the temporary ones. Talk to your consultant about sex and make sure you get any specialist advice and aftercare you need.

Straight after the operation you will have a catheter in the new bladder and a drain in your abdomen. These will normally be removed after a couple of days, but you will also have two fine tubes which will be draining the kidneys that will normally have to stay in for 7 to 10 days. Whilst you have the catheter in, it is important that this isn’t blocked by mucus so your will be shown how to flush your new bladder to remove any excess.

**How do I empty my neobladder?**

The nerve supply to your new bladder will have been interrupted, so you will not get the same sensation as you did with a normal bladder when you need to wee. You will need to learn a new way to feel and understand when you need to go to the loo, as well as learn a new technique to a empty your new bladder.

The ‘feeling’ you get when you need to empty your new bladder varies between people. Some people experience a feeling of fullness, while others report that they feel like they need to fart! Don’t worry, your body will find a way of telling you when it’s time to wee. You will also have to learn a new way to have a wee. You will need to relax your pelvis and strain your abdominal muscles to squeeze your wee out. Most men find that they need to sit down to do this rather than trying to do it standing up.

It is important not to strain too much as this can cause problems, so take your time and don’t try to force it out at all costs. While you are still in hospital, you will be shown how to use a thin catheter in case you need to rely on one to empty your bladder completely. Wee left in your bladder can make you more prone to infections and could cause problems for your kidneys. If in doubt, ask for help and then ask for help again.

The first few months are all about getting used to this new way of having a wee. Remember you are learning a brand new skill, and very few people get it right first time. Don’t feel like a failure if it takes longer than average to get it all sorted, and be prepared for some incontinence in the beginning. Some people are lucky and it just ‘clicks’ and they are sorted within a couple of months. Many take longer, sometimes a lot longer, but you will get there. Do have a chat with people in our **Confidential Forum** who have neobladders – they will happily give you their best advice.
One other thing to know is that your new bladder will produce a thick white mucus. This will always be in your wee from now on, but it is quite normal and is nothing to worry about. If you get any serious problems, like not being able to empty your bladder at all, even with a catheter, do go straight to hospital. If you are having difficulties in any way, contact your specialist nurse.

**Life after surgery**

Your medical team will give you any specific instructions you need to live with a neobladder. If you don’t understand anything, do ask them to explain it again. It will take several months before you regain your strength. Remember, you have just had a major operation. Do try and keep to a healthy diet with plenty of liquids. These extra liquids are very important in the early days to prevent constipation. You have just had a length of your bowel cut out and what is left needs some tender care!

**The best tips**

Take your time getting used to your new bladder. Don’t panic if it seems to be taking a while to get the hang of it all. Try not to do any heavy lifting for about 6 months. And remember, in the beginning it will leak. But it will stop leaking and life will be good.
About Fight Bladder Cancer

Fight Bladder Cancer is the only patient and carer led charity for bladder cancer in the UK.

At Fight Bladder Cancer, we take great care to provide up-to-date, unbiased and accurate facts about bladder cancer. We have a very supportive medical advice panel made up of some of the best professionals working with bladder cancer, and hope that our information will add to the medical advice you have had and help you to make decisions.

To donate, go to our Just Giving page: justgiving.com/fightbladdercancer

or text FBCD00 £5 to 70070

Registered charity 1157763

Please note that our services are not intended to replace advice from your medical team.