Common Questions and Answers After Cystectomy

**What should I eat after cystectomy?**

Eat whatever feels good! Your body and your intestines have been through a lot! The area where your intestines are attached back together will likely be swollen for a while. Drinking liquids with calories nearly constantly and eating small meals frequently are the keys to getting enough calories while things settle down. Gradually you will be able to eat more and more. Until then, take it easy on yourself and eat or what tastes good, and what causes you the least amount of abdominal pain/bloating. In general, you may be wanting to start eating healthier after cancer surgery. This is a great long-term goal. Save it for three months after recovery when your intestines are more recovered.

**How do I train my new bladder?**

Training the bladder is not rocket science but does take time and patience. When the sphincter muscle is strong there is little leakage. When it is weak, leakage happens. The external sphincter needs to be strengthened in order to control the urine. At first this takes conscious focus. With time it will become automatic. The external sphincter is a muscle much like any other. It becomes strengthened through repetition. We recommend you start Kegel exercises as early as possible. Kegel exercises consist of tightening the sphincter for a few seconds and then release. This should be performed at least 10 times per hour while you are awake. Most patients find that the pelvic floor muscles get notably stronger around 4 to 6 weeks. Generally, continence is gained in the morning first, followed by the afternoon, followed by with coughing or sneezing.

**How can I stop leaking at night time?**
Nighttime continent is difficult because there is no nerve that sends a message from your new bladder to the sphincter telling it to tighten when the neobladder gets full. This is what happened with the original bladder. The more full the neobladder gets the more likely it might leak. The keys to staying dry at night include: cutting back on fluids during and after dinner, and getting up at least once in the middle of the night to keep the neobladder empty. Some patients need to set alarms to get up before bladder leakage. The bladder cancer advocacy network chat room bcan.org may also have helpful suggestions.

**Can I drink alcohol after surgery?**

Yes. Everything but smoking in moderation is reasonable. You should not smoke or chew tobacco to keep your chances of cancer coming back to a minimum. Smoking Marijuana may also increase your risk of recurrent cancer.

**Can I shower after surgery?**

You may shower or bathe 48 hours after surgery. Hot tubs are ok if all wounds are closed and all tubes have been removed.

**What other things can I do after surgery?**

You can do anything you feel up to doing with just two exceptions. No driving while you are taking pain pills and no lifting anything greater than 10 pounds until 6 weeks after surgery.

**When will things taste normal again?**

Generally things return to normal taste-wise somewhere between 4 to 6 weeks after surgery.

**What should I look for after all of my tubes have been removed?**

Once you have lost all of your hardware from surgery, you will start to feel better. Expect to still feel tired being free from tubes
is a big step forward in your new life. There is a chance you can get an infection after your tubes are removed, so keep an eye out for fever greater than 101°, heavy mucous, foul-smelling or very cloudy urine. If your are worried about infection, you can call our clinic nurse (720-848-0170), email your provider through MyHealthConnection or call the resident on call after hours (720-848-0000). If you experience leg swelling on one side that is new it may be a sign of a blood clot. This can be a dangerous condition and should be evaluated immediately in the closest emergency room. New, acute chest pain or shortness of breath are always a reasons to visit the emergency room as well.

**What does my new normal look like?**

The new normal may involve your abdominal tissue around the scar being a little higher on one side than the other. This tends to resolve with time. There is often genital swelling that will resolve over the next few months. Mild lower extremity swelling may be seen after surgery that also generally resolves with time. Expect to feel quite tired even months after your surgery. Allow yourself lots of naps. Walking is important. Try to walk at least three times daily to prevent blood clots and pneumonia. Walking also keeps the intestines working as well. Gas, constipation, and even diarrhea are all expected changes right after surgery. Things tend to settle down to somewhere near normal around three months.

**When can I go back to work?**

You may go back to work as soon as you feel up to it. Most patients wait around twelve weeks before returning. Most patients start with a lighter schedule at first.

**When can I have sex?**
Sex should wait until general healing is secure at 4 to 6 weeks. Most patients prefer to wait until they have regained urinary control as well (12 weeks average). In men, even with nerve-sparing procedures, the nerves are traumatized by surgery and have less-than-ideal functioning for at least six months after surgery. For men, the sooner aids for erectile function are used, the better then long-term result.

**Tell me about infections with a neobladder?**

Neobladders, being made out of intestine, will generally always have bacteria inside of them. If the urine is checked when there are no symptoms of infection, there will be bacteria present. However fever, malaise, cloudy or foul-smelling urine with more mucous, are signs of significant infection. Bladder infections are not uncommon after surgery. Many patients get an infection every few years. This is not something to be anxious about, but something to keep in mind if you just aren't feeling well. You may email your provider, call our clinic, or talk to a resident on call if you feel you may have an infection. Often times we will give you a standing order for antibiotics you may for fill as needed if you have already experienced an infection in the past.

**How do I contact someone if I have problems?**

Use MyHealthConnection to email your personal provider. Call 720-848-0000 for issues with system.

Call our clinic and leave a message for our nurses between 8-430: 720-848-0170

Call the resident on call if it is after 430 or nights or weekend. 720-848-0000