Living with a reconstruction

Most people who have a bladder reconstruction are able to return to a normal life. However the first few months after surgery can be very difficult. You will need to learn how to empty your reconstructed bladder and to recognise the changed sensations which mean that it is full. In addition, you will have had major surgery and will be dealing with changes affecting, for instance your sex life and ability to have children.

We will teach you how to empty your reconstructed bladder by relaxing the muscles in your pelvis while at the same time tightening the muscles in your abdomen. Most people quickly get used to this technique and find it quite comfortable.

If you are having difficulty emptying your reconstructed bladder or are not able to empty it completely at first, you may have to use a catheter to drain urine. We will teach you how to do this if it is necessary.

For the first weeks, your reconstructed bladder will not hold as much urine as a normal adult bladder. This means that you will need to empty it more frequently. As your bladder stretches over time, this will improve, but you will still need to wake up once or twice a night to go to the toilet.

As your reconstructed bladder will not contain the same types of nerve endings as a real bladder, you will not get the same sensation when you need to go to the toilet. Instead, you may feel like your abdomen is full or you need to pass wind.

Because of the loss of nerve function, around 25% of people who have a bladder reconstruction will have some problems with incontinence. This usually happens during the night while you are asleep. To help with this, you may find it useful to go to the toilet at set times during day, including before you go to bed.

Our specialist nurses will be able to give you help and support if you are having any specific problems.

It is not unusual to feel quite depressed in the weeks immediately after surgery. It's important to know that there many lines of support open to you to help you overcome the difficulties you may experience. These include:

- your specialist nurse
• buddies - other patients who have been through the same experiences