Side effects

The majority of patients don’t suffer any side effects following a bladder cancer reconstruction operation. However, you should make sure you are aware of the complications which could occur so that you can ask for extra medical help if you start to feel unwell.

You should contact your doctor immediately if you develop a fever or vomiting, especially if you also have unexpected pain in your abdomen. If you are unable to pass urine and can’t pass a catheter, you should go to your nearest A&E department as quickly as possible. Your specialist nurse will be able to help if you have problems training the bladder or get repeated urinary tract infections.

Common side effects

You have around a one in ten chance of developing one of these side effects. Men should also be aware that won’t be able to ejaculate or have children after the operation as their sperm sacs will have been removed.

Common side effects include:

- the cancer has not been cured
- you may find it difficult to clear your bowel in the first few weeks after your operation (this may continue in the long term for five to 10% of patients)
- difficulty emptying the reconstructed bladder properly, which could lead to long term self-catheterisation or wearing pads
- for women:
  - discomfort or difficulty having sex
  - menopause may occur if the ovaries have been removed
- for men:
  - a high risk of impotence (lack of erections)
  - one in three chance of unsuspected prostate cancer being found

Occasional side effects
There is between a one in ten and one in 50 chance that you may develop one of these side effects.

Occasional side effects include:

- a reaction to anaesthetic, or cardiovascular problems which may need intensive care
- infection in the abdominal cavity or in the wound
- blood loss which needs repeat surgery
- developing a hernia which needs further treatment
- a decrease in kidney function over time
- scarring of the bowels or ureters which needs further surgery

Rare side effects

You have a less than one in 50 chance of developing one of these side effects.

Rare side effects include:

- diarrhoea or a vitamin deficiency (due to the shortened bowel)
- bowel and urine leakage
- scarring of the bowel or ureters
- accidental injury to the rectum during surgery, which would need a colostomy bag
- inability to create a reconstructed bladder, in which case we will need to create a urinary diversion and stoma
- (in men) need to remove the urethra as part of the procedure