After radical cystectomy to remove the bladder, the surgeon creates a new way for urine to leave the body. This new system is called a urinary diversion. An ileal conduit is the easiest and most common urinary diversion performed by urologists. The surgeon creates a small opening in the abdomen called a stoma, or mouth. The surgeon then takes a short segment of the small intestine (that has been removed from the rest of the intestine) and connects one end to the stoma. The ureters, which normally carry urine from the kidneys to the bladder, are attached to the other end of the segment of intestine.

The urine now travels from the ureters into the newly formed ileal conduit, on to the stoma and out of the body. A plastic appliance known as an ostomy bag (or urostomy) is placed over the stoma to collect the urine. This is worn outside the body around the stoma 24 hours a day. An ostomy is a surgically created hole that lets waste leave the body, and there are ostomy nurses who specialize in helping patients with ostomies.

BCAN surveyed bladder cancer patients to find out what they thought patients should know about three key areas related to getting an ileal conduit. These tips are their thoughts and advice.

What Questions Should Patients Ask Their Doctor About Getting an Ileal Conduit?

1. Why is getting an ileal conduit a good option for me?
   - What are the other urinary diversion options?
   - What are the benefits and risks of the ileal conduit?
   - Why do you think this is the best option for me?

2. What will my life be like with an ileal conduit?
   - Where will we put the opening for the bag (the stoma)?
   - How will the bag work? How often do I need to change it? How do I care for the surrounding area?
   - What symptoms or side effects should I look out for? What are the risks of hernias or infections?
   - How long is the recovery process? What should I expect during recovery?
   - How do I choose what supplies to use? Where can I buy supplies?
   - How will the bag affect my lifestyle? Is there anything I won't be able to do?
   - I would like to get more information. Can you recommend an ostomy nurse who specializes in bladder cancer patients? Can I talk to another patient who has an ileal conduit?
   - Can I wear an ostomy bag before the surgery to see how it feels?

3. What is your experience with this treatment?
   - How many radical cystectomies have you done? How many of those have involved ileal conduits?
   - Where can I go to get a second opinion?
What are the Most Important Things Patients Should Know About Getting an Ileal Conduit?

1. **People are there to help you.**
   - An ostomy nurse can help you decide where you want the stoma to be, help you learn how to change the bag and clean the skin around it, and give you advice on what ostomy supplies you might want to try.
   - If you’re having issues with leakage or irritation, talk to an ostomy nurse about finding supplies that work better for you.
   - Ostomy manufacturers will send you samples of supplies so that you can try them out and see which ones you like best.

2. **With care, you can avoid a lot of problems.**
   - Surgery can cause swelling, so the size of your stoma will shrink as you recover after the surgery. As you recover, make sure your ostomy supplies still fit.
   - Make sure your clothing is comfortable, and not too tight or too loose. When you decide where you want your stoma to be, think about how it will affect what you can wear.
   - Have extra supplies in your car, at work, and when you travel, in case you need to change your bag.
   - Empty your bag frequently, and change it frequently. This is the best way to prevent leaks.
   - Leaks will still happen sometimes, so have a plan for what you will do in case of a leak.

What are your Top Tips for Coping with an Ileal Conduit?

1. **You can live a healthy, active life with an ileal conduit!**
   - The ileal conduit is one of the easiest urinary diversions for the surgeon to create, and it can be one of the easiest to manage as a patient.
   - With the bag, you don’t need to get up to urinate at night.
   - Maintaining and changing the bag will become a routine part of your everyday life, just like going to the bathroom is now.

2. **Support is important.**
   - Explain as much about the bag as you want to family and friends, and ask them for help when you want it or need it.
   - It can be helpful to talk to someone who already has the ileal conduit. Your doctor might be able to connect you with someone, or you can find someone by calling BCAN.
   - You can find more information about ostomies by visiting the United Ostomy Associations of America website, www.ostomy.org or calling (800) 826-0826.

3. **Be aware of what might happen next.**
   - Now that you have a urinary diversion, you will need occasional blood tests to check your body salts and kidney function. You will also need occasional x-rays to confirm the health of your urinary system.
   - You will still need regular checkups to make sure the cancer has not spread.
   - Your doctor may recommend chemotherapy to help prevent the cancer from spreading.

BCAN provides this information as a service. Publication of this information is not intended to take the place of medical care or the advice of your doctor. BCAN strongly suggests consulting your doctor or other health professional about the information presented.