

Nobody Told Me About Returning to Work After Bladder Removal

[00:00:00] Hello, and welcome back to Leaks, Laughs, and Life with Urostomy. I'm your host, Dawn.

[00:00:08] Today, we are continuing our special series called Nobody Told Me, where we explore the real-life parts of bladder removal and living with a urostomy that don't always get explained in the beginning. And today's topic is one of those back to real life moments, returning to work.

[00:00:25] Before we jump in, a quick reminder that I am not a doctor. I'm just a woman without a bladder sharing what I've learned through my own journey, a lot of research, and plenty of trial and error. What worked for me may not work for everyone, so always check with your healthcare team when it comes to your own medical care.

[00:00:46] All right, let's talk about returning to work.

[00:00:49] On paper, returning to work after surgery sounds pretty straightforward. You heal, you recover, and then you go back to your new normal life. But what nobody told me is that [00:01:00] this somewhat new normal, quote, unquote, feels very different after bladder removal and living with a urostomy.

[00:01:09] It is not just about whether your body is physically healed enough to go back. It's about everything else that comes with it. Your energy levels that are not what they used to be, stamina that comes and goes in waves, and these both return as time goes on, just not all at once. The mental awareness or lack thereof, and then learning very quickly that your body is still adjusting even if your calendar says it's time to return.

[00:01:37] One of the biggest surprises for me was exhaustion. Not just tired at the end of day tired. I'm talking about that deep bone level fatigue where you can function, but only in short bursts, and then you hit a wall.

[00:01:52] Nobody really warned me about how long that part could or would last. For me, it [00:02:00] was months, and even today, 14 months later, I still hit that wall, just not as often.

[00:02:07] And then there's the practical side of going back to work with the urostomy, things you might have not thought about before. Things like bathroom access suddenly becomes something you think about more than you used to, unless you had IC. Then you know, we all know where every bathroom is located from here to any of the surrounding states.

[00:02:27] And then there's the timing between the bathroom trips and the planning that goes along with that. And then the what-ifs creep in. What if something leaks? Or what if you need to empty your pouch at the wrong time during a busy day? Or you're on a long phone call, or your break isn't for another hour and you feel the pouch about to explode.

[00:02:49] These are not things workplaces think about or allow for, and honestly, most of us do not think about them until we're in the thick of things. Being prepared for anything does help to ease the [00:03:00] fears. Having your urostomy survival kit with you if you're working away from a desk or at your desk, so you can take it easily with you to the bathroom when needed.

[00:03:10] Side note: if you're not sure what to put in these kits, please listen to episode number 11, Urostomy Survival Kits. I will tell you all you need to have in those.

[00:03:22] Another thing that becomes part of the equation, clothing. What is comfortable for sitting or standing for you all day? What does not irritate your pouch?

[00:03:31] What supports it? What lets you move without constantly being aware of what's going on underneath your clothes? Figuring out what is comfortable before you go back is a necessity. Before returning to work,

wear what you are planning on wearing when you do go back, I'd say a week, maybe even two before you return.

[00:03:51] That way you have a chance to figure out what does and does not work for you and adjust accordingly. Then there's the emotional side, [00:04:00] which is truly the part nobody talks about, ever. It seems to get overlooked the most, and there are moments when you really just want to hide away from everything, but you can't, because that's not realistic, so you push through.

[00:04:17] Walking back into a workplace after something this big can feel weird. It feels awkward and downright uncomfortable. You look the same on the outside to everyone else, but you do not feel the same on the inside, and nobody can really tell what you've just been through. Your clothes may look a little bit different, but no one really pays that much attention to what you wear, unless you come into work in your pajamas, which I get to do sometimes.

[00:04:45] There's this quiet adjustment period of where you are figuring out how to be you again in a space that remembers the old version of you, and it can take time. For me, it was not a straight line back to normal.

[00:05:00] It was more like figuring it out day by day. Some days went fine... and some didn't. Yes, I had the dreaded leak at work happen, and it was embarrassing.

[00:05:12] But thankfully, my boss, who is also a good friend, made me laugh about it and was extremely understanding and very helpful. I did have to leave to go home and change because I wasn't prepared. No one had told me I needed to be.

[00:05:28] There were some days I was completely wiped out by noon and would come home and sleep for hours, and I had to learn to give myself permission to listen to what my body needed because nobody told me that returning to work was not just a physical step. It's a full adjustment phase. Whether you choose the recovery phase that either supports you or works against you is completely your decision. There is no medal for pushing through too fast. And at the end of the day, going back to work [00:06:00] after bladder removal is not just about showing up. It's about learning how to show up differently for yourself with more awareness, more patience, and a lot more flexibility than you probably ever had before.

[00:06:15] Be gentle with yourself, and if you need time and are able to, please take it. You will not regret it.

[00:06:26] Thanks for hanging out with me today on Leaks, Laughs, and Life with a Urostomy, and another episode of the Nobody Told Me series. If this episode helped you, please share it with someone who might be preparing to return to work or is already in that transition.

[00:06:40] And if you have your own nobody told me moment, send it my way. I promise you are not alone in it. You can either connect with me on social media where I share more real-life moments, tips, and honest conversations about life with a urostomy, or you can email me from my website where you'll also find more podcast episodes [00:07:00] and the Amazon links to my books, "Leaks, Laughs, and Life with a Urostomy: The Handbook", and my journal, "My Plot Twist Journal", at leakslaughslife.com.

[00:07:11] Until next time, take care of yourself, and thank you for listening. It means more than you know. Bye for now.