J-Pouch 101

What is a J-Pouch

A J-Pouch is an alternative to a permanent ostomy for ulcerative colitis and familial polyposis patients that helps maintain functional bowel control. It is the most common internal pelvic pouch and is also known as IPAA (Ileal Pouch Anal Anastomosis) surgery. It is an elective surgery, meaning patients can choose either to have a J-Pouch or opt for a stoma.

Some people will experience “pouchitis” or inflammation of the J-Pouch. This is a complication that is treated with antibiotics. Symptoms of pouchitis include bleeding, fever, pain, and an increase in stool frequency.

It is recommended that long term follow-ups with a gastroenterologist/colorectal surgeon to assess pouch health are conducted. Complications may occur years after J-Pouch surgery.

How a J-Pouch is Made

J-Pouch surgery is often done in 3 surgery stages with a period of approximately 12 weeks between surgeries, depending on the overall condition of the patient at the time of surgery. (Actual number of stages may vary based on surgeon’s recommendations and patient health:)

1. **Stage 1**
   - The large intestine (colon) is removed. Patient is given a temporary end ileostomy to allow the body to heal and recover. They will wear an external ostomy pouch.

2. **Stage 2**
   - The rectum is removed, leaving behind a small anal cuff. The internal reservoir is created using the end of the small intestine, creating a “J-shaped” pouch. The J-Pouch will be connected to the anal cuff, creating an ileoanal anastomosis. The patient is usually given a temporary loop ileostomy to allow the body to heal in its own pace. Be weeks or months, it will happen, your J-Pouch is the most prized possession because it gives you your life back.

3. **Stage 3**
   - When the internal pouch is found to be leak-proof and healthy, the temporary ileostomy is reversed. The stool now passes through the small intestine, into the reservoir, and out through the anus.

For more information about J-Pouch surgery and continent diversions, visit ostomy.org.