

# Colostomy: Self-care and dietary guidelines



## In this article:

- Emptying and changing your ostomy pouch
- How to manage gas and odor
- Addressing constipation and diarrhea

**A**fter colostomy surgery it's very natural for you to have questions about self-care and your diet. It's an experience that has changed your life and until you become more comfortable with these changes, some anxiety is normal. However, you can lessen your anxiety by learning more about self-care and diet.

### *Emptying your ostomy pouch*

A common guideline is to empty your pouch when it is  $\frac{1}{3}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  full, or more often if you desire. A full pouch can get heavy and cause the adhesive backing on your barrier to loosen from your skin. Emptying the pouch is also more difficult when it's full. Refer to the "Instructions for Use" for your particular pouching system.

### Helpful tips:

- *To avoid spilling, begin by holding the end of the pouch up*
- *You can empty your pouch while either sitting or standing over the toilet*
- *To prevent water from splashing, you can place a tissue into the toilet, or empty the pouch while flushing the toilet*
- *Wipe the end of the pouch with a tissue to prevent odor*
- *Always remember to securely close the end of the pouch*

### Changing your ostomy pouch

Typically you should change your pouching system about twice a week, usually when your stoma is less active. But the frequency will depend on your body, your activity level, and the type of barrier you use. The best time of day to change your pouching system may be first thing in the morning – before you've had anything to eat or drink.

If there is burning or itching under the barrier, change your pouching system immediately. Burning and itching could indicate leakage, and possible damage to the skin around the stoma.

#### Removing your pouch

Gather all supplies and place them within easy reach before you begin. To remove your barrier work slowly from the top to the bottom, pushing down on the skin as you lift off the barrier. Never rip or tear off the barrier too quickly, because that can irritate the skin. At times your skin may look pink or red after removing the adhesive, but this should fade in a few minutes.

#### Cleaning the stoma and surrounding skin

Clean the stoma and the skin around it with a moist washcloth or soft paper towel, then let it dry completely. You don't need to use soap, cleansers, or moistened wipes as they may cause skin problems and keep the barrier from sticking. Remember to look at the skin around your stoma for redness or signs of irritation.

Always check your stoma as well. The natural color of your stoma should be red. If your stoma looks very dark, purple or black, contact your doctor or Wound, Ostomy, Continence (WOC) Nurse. When you change your pouching system you may notice a little bleeding. This is normal and should stop quickly.



### Applying your pouch

In the first six to eight weeks after your colostomy surgery, the size of your stoma should gradually decrease (if you are concerned about how your stoma is healing, contact your doctor or WOC nurse). During this time, it is very important to measure your stoma every time you change your pouching system.

### Additional self-care guidance

#### Bathing

Showering and bathing will not hurt your stoma or your pouching system. Some people prefer to shower without their pouching system on the days they change their pouch and barrier. You can decide what works best for you.

### Helpful tips:

- *Cut the barrier opening to the size of your stoma without leaving skin exposed*
- *Apply the skin barrier directly to clean, dry skin*
- *Avoid the use of any moisturizers around the stoma*
- *Ensure no skin is showing between the barrier and stoma to prevent skin irritation and leakage*
- *Apply gentle pressure to skin barrier for about a minute for the best adhesion*

Remember to avoid using bath oils, or soaps with moisturizers and perfumes. These products may make it harder for the barrier to stick to your skin. Have all of your materials ready before you bathe, so your pouching system can be easily applied afterwards.

### **When away from home**

When you're away from home, even for a short time, it's a good idea to carry an extra pouching system and plastic storage bags for disposal. Leakage shouldn't happen, but if it does you will want to be prepared. On hot days, do not leave extra supplies in your car.

### **When to call your WOC Nurse**

Call your nurse if you have any medical concerns about your stoma, including:

- ***A change in the size or appearance of your stoma***
- ***A skin rash or irritated skin around your stoma***
- ***Discomfort or problems with pouching***
- ***Frequent leaking***
- ***A weight loss or gain that causes problems with your pouching system***

### **Dietary guidelines**

Below are some general dietary guidelines that are helpful for people with a colostomy. However, if your doctor has recommended a special diet, you should follow that advice.

### **How to manage gas**

Having gas is normal. You might find that certain foods give you gas or cause some discomfort. Everyone responds differently. If you think a particular food is causing problems, avoid it for a while and reintroduce into your diet later. It may take five or six hours from the time you eat until gas passes from your stoma. Gas can also develop from the way you eat, so you should eat slowly. It will also help to avoid chewing gum, drinking through a straw and talking with food in your mouth.

You can buy products at the drug store to help reduce gas. In addition, gas filters are now available on most colostomy pouches. The charcoal filter allows for gas to be deodorized before leaving the pouch. Sometimes liquid stool could eventually clog the filter, at which time the pouch can be changed.

Foods that cause gas in one person don't necessarily cause gas in everyone, so take note of what foods affect you.





## Gas-producing foods and drinks:

- Cabbage
- Spinach
- Cucumbers
- Beans
- Brussels sprouts
- Onions / garlic
- Broccoli / cauliflower
- Sweet corn
- Peas
- Carbonated drinks such as soda and beer

## How to manage odor

The only time you or anyone else should notice an odor is when you are emptying your colostomy pouch. Even then, pouch odor can be reduced with special drops (one type of drops is the Brava® Lubricating Deodorant made by Coloplast). You simply put the drops in when the pouch has been emptied, or when you put on a new pouch. The next time you empty your pouch, the drops should reduce the amount of odor and help drain stool from the pouch.

Some people prefer to carry bathroom deodorizer with them. This can be helpful when using a restroom in a public place.

## Foods that cause stool odor:

- Fish
- Eggs
- Cheese
- Turnips
- Garlic
- Beans
- Vegetables in the cabbage family

## Constipation and diarrhea

Sometimes you might get constipated just as you did before your colostomy surgery. To help prevent constipation, eat a diet high in fiber, fruits, vegetables and grains (for instance, cereals). As long as your doctor gives

you the OK, drink about six to eight glasses of liquid a day.

You might consider a laxative if the constipation doesn't go away. However, it's important to check with your doctor first, to see if that's right for you.

Sometimes you may have diarrhea just as you did before your colostomy surgery. Loose, runny stools can be caused by a flu-like illness, your body's reaction to food, or a medication such as an antibiotic. When you have diarrhea your body loses water, sodium and potassium. You'll need to drink plenty of extra fluids, including an eight-ounce glass of water every time you empty your pouch. Sports drinks can help you replace sodium and potassium.

If you have three or more consecutive loose stools, however, you should contact your doctor.

## Foods that can thicken stool:

- Pudding
- Creamy peanut butter
- Potatoes
- Bread
- Pasta
- Baked apples / applesauce
- Cheese
- Rice

## Additional thoughts

Soon after your surgery, caring for and managing your ostomy is all new to you, but when you get used to it these activities become a daily routine.

Remember that your surgery represents a change to your body only. You can still live a full life.

Call your healthcare provider if you have any medical concerns about managing your ostomy. You may also contact your Coloplast Consumer Care Advisor for product usage and availability questions at [1-877-858-2656](tel:1-877-858-2656).