

# Getting into Exercise



## In this article:

- Why you should exercise
- Easing into it – knowing the basics
- Suggested activities
- Team sports & yoga

**Important:** Check with your doctor or your Wound, Ostomy, Continence (WOC) Nurse before you start or increase your exercise activities. What is good for one person may be too much for someone else.

**Y**ou've heard it many times but it's worth repeating: physical activity is good for everyone. Getting exercise or participating in sports – as long as your doctor or nurse says it's OK – is highly encouraged. In the months after surgery, exercise can speed up your recovery. It can also prevent complications that might happen after sitting or lying too long.

### Why you should exercise

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It's worth making time in your life to exercise when you consider that it can offer a number of benefits. It can lead to faster recovery, a stronger heart, improved blood flow and improve your balance and flexibility. It also can increase your self-confidence and give you more energy overall. Maybe most important of all, physical exercise is one of the top ten stress busters.

### Easing into it – knowing the basics

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There are limits, especially soon after your surgery. Until your stoma and abdominal area are fully healed, a lot of activity can put you at risk for a hernia. To avoid getting a hernia, do not lift more than 8 pounds (the weight of a gallon of milk) for the first six weeks after surgery. When you're lifting and/or using abdominal muscles, an ostomy support belt is strongly recommended.

## Suggested activities

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For your overall health and well-being, it's important to get moving. The simple rule is: take it easy, start out slowly and build up gradually. When you do start exercising for longer amounts of time, make sure you drink plenty of fluids before, during and after exercise. If you feel lightheaded at any point, stop and rest. And it's a good idea to empty your pouch before any exercise or activity.

### Start by Walking

Walking can be an easy and gentle way to get back into a routine. It's also an activity that you can start soon after surgery, and you can gradually increase both time and distance. When you challenge yourself to walk farther, your strength and endurance will improve. Make sure you give your body the support it needs with a good pair of walking shoes. Walking can help the following areas of your body: heart, lungs, muscles and joints.

### Consider Biking

As long as your doctor approves, biking can be a good option. Your doctor may want you to wait until your abdominal area is completely healed before starting to bike. Biking can be an excellent activity since it's a low-impact exercise that doesn't put too much strain on your abdomen. If you had to have surgery to remove your anus, you'll need to wait longer to begin biking, to allow this area to heal.

### Swimming

Swimming and water aerobics are a great way to keep fit. With your weight supported by the water, swimming gives your muscles a workout with minimal risk of injury. Swimming can also help you develop more flexibility, and it's a good option if you're bothered by arthritis.

Don't avoid the pool, thinking that "others will know" about your ostomy. Most people will never notice! If you want to be more discreet, you can use a small ostomy pouch specially designed to be less bulky. You can also find specialty swimwear available. You might want to consider the following:

- Snug swimsuits with dark colors or busy patterns can help hide the ostomy pouch.
- If you wear a filtered pouch, don't forget to cover it with a filter sticker.
- You may want to protect the barrier by adding Elastic Barrier Strips to the edges. These strips will add extra support and prevent roll-up of the barrier edge.

## Team sports & yoga

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Again, check with your doctor. Competitive sports can put a strain on your body, so it is important that you be fit before you take part. Make sure your pouch is empty before starting. Some people also wear close fitted waistbands or girdles to keep their pouch securely in place. For sports such as football, rugby, wrestling or kung fu, there are protective stoma guards that can help prevent stoma injury. Always inspect your stoma after participating in sports. If any injuries occur, contact your WOC Nurse.

Yoga is another good option for exercise, since it reduces stress, strengthens muscles and improves balance. Yoga can be done anywhere – at home or in a class – and can be done in a standing or sitting position. It's also an exercise that does not strain the heart.

## Additional thoughts

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Some people find it hard to get motivated to exercise, but nearly everyone finds that, after exercise, they are glad they made the effort. It can help improve your muscle tone, your health and your mood. You might exercise alone, to reflect or meditate. Or you might exercise with others, to socialize. Whatever your style and whatever you choose for your exercise routine, exercise has the bonus of being fun and good for you.

If you have any questions regarding stoma care or ostomy pouching systems, please contact your Coloplast Consumer Care Advisor at [1-877-858-2656](tel:1-877-858-2656).