

# Ileostomy: Self-Care and Dietary Guidelines



**A**fter ileostomy 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.

## In this article:

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

### Emptying your ostomy pouch

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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.

### Changing your ostomy pouch

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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

### 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 upward, 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

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. Every time 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 ileostomy surgery, the size of your stoma will gradually decrease. 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.

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 to call your WOC Nurse

Call your nurse if you experience:

- 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

### Helpful tips:

- Cut the barrier  $\frac{1}{8}$ " larger than the stoma.
- 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.

## Dietary Guidelines

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

### Fluid intake

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Drink 10 to 12 glasses of fluid every day unless your doctor tells you otherwise. Since you no longer have a large bowel (a large intestine) to absorb water—and since fluids are lost through your stoma—you need to help your body by drinking more fluids.

More fluids are essential so that you don't become dehydrated. You may be dehydrated if you:

- Notice that your mouth or tongue are dry
- Do not urinate as often, or as much
- Notice that your urine is darker than normal
- Get dizzy when you stand
- Feel weak and don't react normally
- Have cramps in your legs or abdomen
- Are unable to think clearly
- Feel tingling in your hands and feet

Call your doctor if you show signs of dehydration. If you are dehydrated, try to increase your fluid intake. You will need to replace your body's electrolytes—sodium and potassium—by drinking or eating the following.

#### To replace potassium:

- Broths or bouillon
- Sports drinks
- Tea
- Orange juice
- Bananas
- Potatoes
- Apricots

#### To replace sodium:

- Electrolyte drinks or sports drinks
- Broths or bouillon
- Rice water
- Pretzels or crackers

**Important:** Confusion, dizziness and shriveled skin can be signs of extreme dehydration. If you notice these symptoms of extreme dehydration, go to the emergency room.

### Could I sometimes get diarrhea?

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With an ileostomy you may still get diarrhea or even looser, watery stools from time to time. Since your pouch may fill more quickly than normal, you will need to empty it more often.

#### Foods that can thicken stool:

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

If you have three or more consecutive loose stools, you are at risk of getting dehydrated—so you should contact your doctor.



## Foods to avoid

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Before your surgery, large particles of food passed through your large bowel. Now, however, large food particles can easily get caught where your intestine comes through the abdominal wall. If this happens, it can cause a blockage. A food blockage can cause abdominal cramps, pain and watery stools with a bad odor. Stool may be released in spurts, as your intestines try to get the waste past the blockage.

For the first six to eight weeks after your surgery, avoid high-fiber foods that absorb water—foods such as oats, citrus fruits, apples and beans. These high-fiber foods can cause a food blockage or severe cramping soon after your surgery.

### Foods that may cause a food blockage include:

- Nuts
- Popcorn
- Coconut
- Dried fruits
- Celery
- Mushrooms
- Foods like apples that have fibrous peels
- The white fibrous coverings of oranges and grapefruits
- Raw crunchy vegetables (carrots, broccoli, cauliflower and Chinese vegetables)

You can also help avoid a food blockage by eating slowly, chewing your food thoroughly and drinking fluids with your meals.

If you have a food blockage, you are not vomiting and you have some output from your stoma, try to increase your fluid intake slowly. Drink hot tea, or take a hot shower and run water on your back to relax your abdominal muscles.

**Important:** If you have no output from your stoma and you are vomiting, do not drink any liquids. Contact your doctor immediately.

## How to manage odor

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The only time you or anyone else should notice an odor is when you are emptying your ileostomy pouch. Even then, pouch odor can be reduced with special drops. (One type of drops is 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 to empty the contents of your pouch due to the lubrication.

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

## Medications

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Before surgery, you may have been taking medications that were made to be absorbed gradually through both your small and large bowels. Now that you do not have a large bowel, these medications could be only partly absorbed or not absorbed at all. This can happen especially with certain coated pills (called enteric-coated pills) and time-release capsules.

### Medication tips

- Always let your doctor and pharmacist know that you have an ileostomy.
- Do not take time-release or enteric-coated pills.
- Never crush your medications or open time-release capsules. Rather, consult with your pharmacist.
- **Never take a laxative.** This could cause severe dehydration.

## Some final comments

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Feeling comfortable with your body is important, especially after this type of surgery. It's equally important to enjoy good food as a part of a full life. We're hoping these guidelines are helpful to you. If you have any questions regarding stoma care, product usage and availability please contact your Coloplast Consumer Care Advisor at [1-877-858-2656](tel:1-877-858-2656).