

Intimacy



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After your ostomy surgery, you might have questions about how your surgery may affect your sexual health. Intimacy and intercourse are a natural part of life. That doesn't change when you've had ostomy surgery – you can still have a very satisfying sex life.

Approaching intimacy again

As you recover, you will be getting used to the way your stoma and pouch look. The same will be true for your partner. Despite what we see in ads and movies, a perfect body isn't needed for a fulfilling life or a fulfilling sex life. Feeling comfortable with these changes to your body is a critical first step in resuming intimacy.

It's important to feel good, not only physically but psychologically too. Anxiety and doubt affect both desire and sexual function. Anxiety also prevents you from focusing on your partner. Your self-esteem and confidence not only make you feel better generally, they help your partner feel better as well. Together, the two of you can rediscover the intimacy that you enjoyed before.

Easing into it

Once both of you are feeling more comfortable with the changes to your body, think about how you can approach sexual activity in a relaxed, non-pressured way. Be open to discussing your feelings, too, so that your partner doesn't misinterpret an initial reluctance to have intercourse. Share your concerns, and listen to

your partner's concerns. Honesty in talking about this topic will only help build mutual trust and respect between the two of you. Be patient and allow both yourself and your partner the time you need.

Making intimacy comfortable

Talk with your doctor or your Wound, Ostomy, Continence (WOC) Nurse about any types of sexual activity that you should avoid. You might want to try positions that keep your weight off your stoma. Some options include lying side by side, front to back, or putting a pillow under your abdomen for support.

You should never have intercourse through the stoma. Depending on the reason for your surgery, you might need to avoid anal intercourse as well. If a woman has had vaginal reconstructive surgery, she will need her doctor's OK to resume vaginal intercourse.

Pouch recommendations

Keeping the pouch clean and empty is a good idea. You may want to put a new pouch on beforehand, and there are several good options if you'd like to use a smaller pouch. Some people switch to a stoma cap. Other people may switch to a smaller mini-pouch or a closed-end pouch. All of these choices are smaller, less bulky and more discreet.

Intimate apparel

Intimate apparel can help to secure the pouch with clothing, and can prevent pouch movement as your body moves. Intimate apparel can help you feel and look sexy, too. Another product option is a pouch cover, which can come in an array of different colors. This can allow you to feel more discreet.

A web search will give you many options. Men might want to consider tank tops, a cummerbund-type garment or boxers with a waistline that helps secure the pouch. Women might consider teddies, camisoles, wraps or silky robes, certain types of thongs or panties with pouch pockets.

Other considerations for intimacy

Sometimes ostomy surgery involves removing the rectum. In men the nerves that regulate erection and ejaculation are near the rectum. In some cases men who've had this type of surgery have problems with erections. However, the majority of men encounter no problems having an orgasm.

For some women surgery might involve removing the rectum and part of the vagina. In these cases women may feel pain during intercourse. Different sexual positions or use of vaginal lubricants can be useful.

If you're unable to resume having intercourse, or if you're unable to find the same level of enjoyment as before, talk to others. Your doctor and WOC Nurse are excellent sources of information.

More resources

In addition to talking to your doctor or WOC Nurse, there may be support groups in your area. Consider attending the groups, since many people have faced and overcome the same challenges. You'll find that it can be very helpful to get suggestions from others. Or, for more one-on-one advice, you and your partner might want to talk to a therapist or a counsellor. A counsellor is a good resource to help with both body and image and intimacy challenges.

The United Ostomy Association of America (UOAA) has a helpful publication, "Intimacy, Sexuality and an Ostomy." It can be found at www.ostomy.org; look under "Ostomy Info" and then click on "Sexuality."

You can also post a specific question on the UOAA's message board online. The message board allows people with ostomies to share stories, tips and more. Just click on the "Discussion Board" link on www.ostomy.org.

If you'd like information about or free samples of pouch options, contact Coloplast® Care Advisor at [1-877-858-2656](tel:1-877-858-2656).