

Socializing



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After your ostomy surgery, you might have questions about socializing. Whom do I tell? What should I say? Do I explain things now or wait until I'm more comfortable with this change myself? Whether your ostomy is temporary or permanent, decisions about telling others are entirely up to you. You may choose to keep this topic private, not mentioning it to anyone. And if you make this decision, others are unlikely to ever know about your ostomy. Chances are you've met someone with an ostomy too, and you didn't even know it. On the other hand, you might decide to tell many or just a few people.

Regardless of your decision about telling friends and co-workers, it's best to tell all healthcare providers, including your pharmacist, that you've had ostomy surgery.

Sharing your story

Again, the choice is yours. If family and friends know you've had surgery, they may be concerned and want to know you're alright soon after surgery. If friends know the nature of your surgery, they're likely to want to support you by listening. Shortly after your ostomy surgery, you may feel uncomfortable talking about it. This is normal. However, let those close to you know when you feel ready to open up about it.

Talking with family

Talking to family and close friends about your surgery is important for both you and your loved ones. Your family and close friends are concerned about your health and recovery. When you share details of your operation, it can help answer their questions and minimize their concerns.

Besides comforting your family and close friends, sharing this part of your life is also a healthy way for you to cope with your emotions. Many people feel a sense of relief when they do open up. The relief comes not only from sharing your story, but also from feeling the support of people close to you. Yet the choice of sharing this information is up to you.

Talking to your children – If you have younger children, it often helps to talk openly about your ostomy surgery. When information is given openly, most children have little trouble accepting it. A lack of openness may make them think the situation is worse than it actually is.

Allow your children time to ask questions, then answer their questions simply and truthfully. Often a simple explanation is all that is needed. Talking about your surgery in a natural way will help resolve any misconceptions your children may have.

If you have teenagers, you know from experience that they may withdraw when it comes to subjects like a parent's health condition or surgery. In this case, some parents choose to tell their teenagers only key points about their surgery. However, it's still important for them to hear your open and honest answers to their questions.

If you have grown children, you might want to speak openly about the surgery and how it has affected you – as you would with any surgery.

Talking with co-workers & others in your life

It is your choice whether you say anything about your surgery or not. However, it's usually best that at least one co-worker knows you've had ostomy surgery, in case any issues arise on the job.

If you choose to be more open with your co-workers, you might begin by explaining the reason for your surgery. Then mention that, as a result of the surgery, you have a different way to empty your bowels or bladder.

Going back to work brings up other questions about socializing, too. How will my ostomy change my daily routine? And how will I adapt to that on the job? While you're still on medical leave, it's a good idea to do

some trial runs to feel confident about leaving home for long periods of time. For a couple weeks before you return to work, you may find it helpful to dress and plan your day as if you were going to your job. This can help you get into a new workday routine – and build your confidence when you do return to your job.

Neighbors and other people in your life may be curious about why you were in the hospital, and they may ask about your health. Think ahead about what to say when questions come up. If you prefer not to discuss details with people you don't know well, you could be more general, and say you've had abdominal surgery, or that you had part of your colon or bladder removed. Never feel that you need to explain details of your surgery to everyone that asks.

Tips for dating

Dating is a normal part of life for many people – including people with ostomies. If you begin dating someone after your surgery, you can choose how much to tell, and when.

Some people think it's better to tell their new partner early on, to try to be open and up front. Others may wait a while, letting their partner get to know them as a person, so the partner can see that an ostomy hasn't changed who they are. However, it may not be best to wait until the relationship is serious before bringing up your ostomy.

When it's time to have the conversation, speak with self-confidence. It may help to start with a simple explanation. Be open to questions. Your new partner needs to understand that having an ostomy has not affected your quality of life. If you seem negative about your ostomy, your partner may view it the same way.

Additional thoughts

Feel free to follow your instincts when it comes to telling others about your surgery. You may find that talking about it becomes much easier over time. Getting back to living – and enjoying the activities you did before surgery – is very important. That includes socializing. Remember, your ostomy is a change to your body only – you are still the same person. And there is no reason your relationships with family, friends and co-workers to change.

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