Patient & Family Guide to Colostomy Surgery

University of Pennsylvania Heath System
Division of Colon & Rectal Surgery
Normal Anatomy

The GI Tract

- Esophagus: Transports food to the stomach
- Stomach: Breakdown (digestion) of food
- Large Bowel (colon): Absorption of water & electrolytes
- Small Bowel (ileum): Absorption of nutrients
- Rectum: Storage of formed stool
- Anus
What is an ostomy (or stoma)?

- An ostomy is a surgically-created opening in the intestine that is brought out through the abdomen (belly).

- Ostomies are frequently temporary, but they can be permanent.

- Types of ostomies:
  - **Ileostomy** - opening in the small intestine (usually on the right side)
  - **Colostomy** - opening in the colon (usually on the left side)
What to expect after surgery

- A healthy stoma is red, moist and has **NO** feeling

- It is usually less than 1 ½ inches in size but will shrink by 30% in the first 4-6 weeks
When possible, stoma sites are marked before surgery to assure a good spot away from skin folds (creases).

Four potential ostomy sites
Caring for your colostomy

- Wear an external pouch (bag) over the stoma that sticks to your belly (the pouch should not show under your clothes)
- Empty the pouch when it is one-third to half way full.
- In the beginning your stool will be loose and you may have to empty the pouch 3-4 times per day
  ‣ As your stool thickens, you will empty the pouch about 2 times per day
  ‣ If your stool gets formed, you may prefer to wear a pouch that can be discarded with each bowel movement
- The skin barrier that sticks to your belly around your stoma (called a wafer) is changed every 5-7 days
Emptying your appliance

A Few Easy Steps!!

1. Undo the velcro at the bottom

2. Pinch the pouch to open & allow the stool to empty into the toilet or a disposable container
Emptying your appliance

A Few Easy Steps!!

3. Clean the opening of the pouch with tissue or a wet paper towel

4. Roll the bottom of the pouch up 3 times and secure the velcro flaps
Changing your appliance

A Few Easy Steps!!

Gather all the supplies that you will need to change your ostomy appliance
Changing your appliance

A Few Easy Steps!!

Carefully remove the skin barrier then clean the stoma & surrounding skin
Changing your appliance

A Few Easy Steps!!

Measure the stoma using the guide then cut the corresponding opening onto the new skin barrier
Changing your appliance

A Few Easy Steps!!

Apply the new skin barrier & secure the pouch
Changing your appliance

A Few Easy Steps!!

Press the pouch firmly onto the skin barrier and roll up the velcro bottom
Choosing your supplies

We will help you find what works best for you!!

- 1-piece vs. 2-piece appliance
- Drainable vs. closed pouch
- Clip vs. velcro closure
- Accessories
Daily life and activities

How will surgery affect your daily life & activities?

- You can wear your regular clothes
  ‣ The pouch should not show under your clothing
  ‣ Avoid belts laying over the stoma

- You may shower with the pouch on
  ‣ On the day you are due to change the appliance, you may shower with the entire pouch off

- People with ostomies return to work, travel, swim, and play most sports

- Intimacy will not hurt the stoma
How will a colostomy change my diet

- Avoid foods & drinks that cause excess gas
  - broccoli, cabbage, beans, corn, soda, cucumbers, dairy products, mushrooms, onions

- Drink 8-10 glasses of fluids daily

- To avoid constipation, eat high-fiber foods like whole grain and bran cereals, whole grain breads, fresh fruit (chew well), and vegetables (raw & cooked)
Common Concerns

- **Will there be an odor?**
  - When everything is on securely, **no one should smell anything**
  - When you open the pouch, there is some odor, but there are deodorant products available which help lessen this odor

- **Will the pouch leak?**
  - Leakages should be rare, especially after you find the product that works best for you and know how to use it properly

- **Will anyone know you have one?**
  - Not unless you choose to tell them
Common Colostomy Problems

๏ **Skin irritation (usually minor)**
  • Usually caused by skin being exposed to stool
  • Use powders instead of creams or ointments
  • Re-evaluate products being used

๏ **Constipation**
  • Drink at least 8-10 glasses of fluid per day
  • You may need to take a stool softener or occasional laxative (e.g. Miralax)
Home care & Supplies

- Your ostomy nurse specialist & the floor nurses caring for you after surgery will teach you and your family how to care for your ostomy before you leave the hospital.

- The discharge planning nurse on your team will arrange for home care nurses to continue to help you and your family at home until you feel confident.

- We will give you some initial supplies and help to make a plan for how you will order ostomy supplies at home.
  - Most insurances cover 80% of the cost of supplies.
  - Supplies are usually **NOT** available in pharmacies or local medical surgical suppliers.
  - There are several large distributors which will ship supplies right to your home and bill your insurance company.
Keys to Success

- A positive attitude
- A sense of humor
- Let your loved ones help
- Ongoing follow-up for questions, support, and to report any problems

  - Home Care Nurses
  - Ostomy Nurse Specialist
  - Your surgical team
Web-based Resources

- Ostomy Product Manufacturers:
  - www.hollister.com
  - www.convatec.com
  - www.us.coloplast.com

- Ostomy Online Communities:
  - www.c3life.com
  - www.ostomy.org

- American College of Surgeons’ Ostomy Home Skills Kit:
  - www.facs.org/patienteducation/skills/skillspatient.html
Your Surgical Team:

**Surgeons:**
- Robert Fry, MD
- Najjia Mahmoud, MD
- Joshua Bleier, MD
- Brian Kann, MD
- Cary Aarons, MD

**Ostomy Nurse Specialists:**
- Ave Preston
- Dawn Carson
- Bill Falone

**Nurse Practitioners & Physician Assistants:**
- Helena McElhenney
- Jennifer Elliot
- Michael Fejka

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