Healthy eating with an ileostomy

Do I have to go on a special diet?
People have bowel surgery for many different reasons including cancer, inflammatory bowel disease, trauma, diverticular disease and bowel obstruction. After surgery people often wonder if they need to eat differently, or go on a special diet. People who have an ileostomy are encouraged to eat a healthy diet, the same as most people.

What is a healthy diet?
A healthy diet includes foods from the five different food groups: bread and cereals, vegetables, fruit, meat and dairy. Variety is the key! The diet should be planned to meet individual needs and tolerances.

Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods from each of the food groups:
- Bread, cereals, rice, pasta, noodles
- Fruit and vegetables
- Dairy products such as milk, yoghurt and cheese
- Meat, chicken, fish, eggs or legumes
- Drink plenty of water!

What about fluids?
The function of the colon is to absorb water and salt. After an ileostomy, absorption can be reduced which results in loss of fluid from the stoma. People therefore need to drink more fluids. Initially fluid losses may be large but the remaining bowel adapts over a period of approximately six weeks and stoma output usually decreases.

Fluid intake
- Have plenty of fluids or you will end up dehydrated.
- Aim for at least 2 litres of fluid each day. If you are losing more than 1 litre of output from your stoma please advise your Dietitian or Doctor.
- You will need extra if you have higher stoma losses, during exercise and in hot weather. Rehydration solutions such as Gastrolyte™, Repalyte™ or sports drinks can be helpful in replacing large fluid losses.
- Your urine should be pale straw-coloured at all times.
Common signs of dehydration are:

- Increased thirst
- Dry mouth
- Urine is more yellow than usual and less urine volume
- Headache
- Weakness
- Dizziness/Faint

Salt intake
Generally most people have enough salt in their diet each day. Your Dietitian will advise if you will need to increase your salt intake.

If you are already following a low salt diet or you do strenuous work/exercise you may need to increase your intake as follows:

- Add salt to food and during cooking
- Include salty foods such as cheese, vegemite, bacon and ham
- Oral rehydration solutions may be useful if output is very high e.g Gastrolyte™ or Repalyte™
- Most sports drinks, eg. Powerade™, Gatorade™, contain only small amounts of salt

Should I avoid any foods?
No: Some foods are incompletely digested and there is nothing wrong with them coming out through the stoma. Some foods may cause blockage of the stoma e.g sweet corn, celery and mangoes. Have these foods in moderation, chop and chew them well.

Will I experience any problems?
Certain foods have been associated with changes in output. Try all foods and only avoid those, which repeatedly cause problems.

- Rice, pasta, potatoes, white bread, smooth peanut butter, banana, cheese and oats may decrease and thicken output.
- Caffeinated beverages, alcohol and spicy foods may increase output.
- Cabbage, onions, legumes, broccoli, cauliflower, asparagus, peas and carbonated drinks may cause increased gas production.
- Fish, onions, leeks, garlic and eggs have been reported to lead to increased odour. Eating yogurt or parsley may help.
- Highly coloured foods (e.g. beetroot and red cordial) may colour your bowel motion. This is quite normal.
Medications
If you see undigested pills/ medication in your stoma ensure you contact your Doctor or Pharmacist to discuss this.

Your Doctor or Dietitian may prescribe drugs to assist in decreasing output. Psyllium products eg Metamucil™ may also help by thickening up output.

Timing of meals
Meal pattern is individual and you may want to time your meals to allow for more acceptable bag changes (eg. change your main meal from evening to lunch). If you find that smaller meals are better you will need to eat more often to ensure you get enough nutrition.

What happens if I'm experiencing an ongoing watery output via my stoma?
- Try to have your fluids at least 15-20 minutes before and after your meals.
- Ensure you are having solid foods at each meal. Rice, pasta, potatoes, white bread, smooth peanut butter, banana, cheese and oats may decrease and thicken output.
- If your Doctor has recommended you have Metamucil try to have it at least 15 minutes before a meal.

If you continue to have a high output via the stoma (more than 1 litre per day) and you have tried the above strategies please contact your Doctor.

Summary
- Chew food well.
- Have regular meals and eat a normal balanced diet.
- Separate your food and fluids at each main meal to help thicken the stoma output.
- Ensure adequate fluid intake (i.e. at least 2 litres a day). If losses are greater than normal (around 1 litre a day), oral rehydration drinks may be necessary.
- Only add additional salt if your Dietitian has advised you should.
- Only avoid foods that cause unacceptable symptoms. Try to reintroduce these foods at a later stage when your bowel has adapted.
- Don’t be afraid to try new foods.