

Healthy Eating with a Colostomy

This resource will help you understand what a colostomy is and how to manage it.

What is a colostomy?

A colostomy is an opening in the abdomen that connects to part of the large bowel (colon). During surgery, a part of your colon is brought to the surface of your abdomen to form an opening (called a stoma). A bag is then attached to the skin to collect waste.

What are the common reasons for a colostomy?

A colostomy is sometimes required when part of the large bowel, rectum or anus is removed or bypassed. Some conditions that may lead to a colostomy include bowel cancer, inflammatory bowel disease, diverticular disease or serious injury to the bowel. Depending on why they are needed, colostomies can be temporary or permanent.

Do I have to go on a special diet?

Having a colostomy doesn't mean you need to be on a special diet! Your body will continue to digest and absorb nutrients in your small bowel. People with a colostomy should eat a healthy, balanced diet, and enjoy a range of foods from each food group. The food groups include breads and cereals, vegetables, fruit, meat and alternatives, dairy and alternatives.

Do I need to avoid any foods?

No. There are usually no dietary restrictions for people with a colostomy.

Colostomy output

The main job of the colon is to reabsorb fluid and salts back into your body to keep you hydrated. As waste products move through the colon, more fluid is absorbed, making the stool more solid. After surgery, your output may be loose or more liquid for a short while. With time, your bowel will absorb more fluid, and your colostomy output will thicken and become more formed.

Colostomy output is different for everyone, but is usually between 200 and 600 ml per day. There are different factors that may affect your stoma output. This includes your diet, how regular your bowels were before surgery and how much bowel was removed or bypassed.

If a large section was removed, your stoma is likely to work more often and have a liquid or toothpaste consistency. If most of the colon is intact, the output will be more formed and less frequent.

What should I do if I have constipation?

- Eat every 2 to 3 hours and drink plenty of water each day.
- Eat more fruits, vegetables and wholemeal or wholegrain foods. Introduce these foods in small amounts to avoid problems with wind.
- Try pear or prune juice.
- If constipation continues, speak to your doctor about laxatives (medicines that relieve constipation).

What should I do if I have diarrhoea?

You may have increased and watery output for a range of reasons. Some reasons include stress, a stomach bug or medicine such as antibiotics.

- Increase your fluid intake or try an oral rehydration drink (e.g. Hydralyte or Gastrolyte) to prevent dehydration.
- Have more potatoes, white bread, pasta, rice, oats, tapioca, smooth peanut butter, banana, and cheese. These foods may decrease and thicken output.
- Have less spicy foods, alcohol, sugary drinks, artificial sweeteners and caffeinated beverages. These foods may increase output.
- If you are worried about your stoma output, speak to your doctor.

What should I do if I have wind or odour?

After surgery your stoma may produce more wind than usual, but this will usually settle with time. Some foods may increase wind or odour from the stoma. It is important to remember that wind is a normal part of bowel function. Only avoid foods that repeatedly cause problems. If the stoma bag fits well, there should be no smell except when changing the bag.

- Cabbage, onions, cauliflower, broccoli, legumes, asparagus, peas, beans, artificial sweeteners and carbonated drinks may increase wind.
- Chewing gum, smoking, drinking through a straw, eating in a hurry or going for long periods without food may also increase wind.
- Fish, onion, garlic, leeks, cheese and eggs may increase odour.
- Yoghurt, cranberry juice and fresh parsley may help to reduce odour.

Is it normal to see food particles in my bag?

Yes, some foods are incompletely digested and pass through the stoma unchanged. This may include fibrous foods such as sweet corn. This is quite normal. Contact your doctor or pharmacist if you see undigested pills/ medicine in your stoma bag.

What food can change output colour?

Some foods may change the colour of your stoma output. This includes brightly coloured food and drinks such as beetroot and red cordial. There is no need to avoid these foods.

When should I eat my meals?

Changing the timing of meals can allow for more convenient bag changes. Eating a smaller evening meal can reduce the need to empty the bag overnight. If you find that smaller meals are better, you will need to eat more often to ensure you get enough nutrition.

Summary

- There is no special diet for people with a colostomy.
- Have regular meals and eat a range of foods from each of the five food groups.
- If you are sensitive to certain foods straight after surgery, retry these foods at a later stage.
- Drink plenty of fluid each day. You may need to drink more if your output is very loose.

For further information, contact your dietitian or nutritionist: _____