

Colorectal Nursing Department

# Common concerns for people with a stoma



## Wind (flatus)

Everybody passes wind, but if you have a stoma this can sometimes be inconvenient or embarrassing, as you have no control over it. However, the following advice may help:

- **Diet:** Some people with a colostomy have found that green vegetables, onions and fruit cause excessive wind, whilst people with an ileostomy have found that peas, onions, beans or green vegetables can be a problem. It is very much an individual issue; a certain food that causes one person to have wind may be perfectly acceptable to another. Try to make a note of which foods cause you to produce more wind, so that you can avoid them if you wish to.
- **Fizzy drinks:** These may cause wind. Some people also find it helpful not to drink whilst eating a meal, but to wait until the end.
- **Flatus filters:** Most modern appliances have an integral filter, which controls the release of wind, helping to prevent the bag from inflating or 'ballooning'. These filters contain charcoal, which helps to neutralise any odours.
- **Charcoal tablets:** These are available over the counter from your local pharmacist and may help reduce excessive wind.
- **Natural yoghurt (probiotic):** Eating natural or 'live' yoghurt can help to neutralise the bacteria in the gut; reducing excessive wind. Actimel and Yakult are brands of yoghurt drink available from most supermarkets, or you may find they have their own brand available.

## Odour

All modern appliances are now made from odour-proof materials and most are available with a flatus filter. You should not get odour unless you are emptying or changing the bag. Deodorants are available on prescription in the form of sprays, drops and powders. Please ask your Advanced Nurse Practitioner or Specialist Nurse Practitioner for advice.

If you have a problem with odour, it is likely to be diet related, but again this is individual. Some people with a colostomy report problems with odour after eating green vegetables and onions. For people with an ileostomy the culprit foods may be fish, eggs, onions and cheese.

## Pancaking

This is a particular problem for people with a colostomy, when the faeces remain stuck around the stoma instead of dropping down into the bag. The following may help:

- **Cover the flatus filter:** This will prevent a vacuum from forming in the bag and helps to stop the faeces from sticking at the top.
- **A piece of screwed up tissue or cotton wool ball in the bag:** Placing this in the bag before wearing it allows some air to remain in the bag. This prevents a vacuum from forming.
- **A small amount of oil (vegetable or sunflower) in the bag:** Apply a small amount to the inside surface of the bag; this will help the faeces to slide down. Take care not to get the oil on the outside of the bag or on the sticky surface, as this will make it oily and it may not stick.
- **A stoma bridge:** This is a small strip of plastic which is stuck onto the outside of the bag, over the stoma. It can be bent to allow the bag to sit away from the stoma, helping the faeces to drop down into the bag. Ask your Advanced Nurse Practitioner or Specialist Nurse Practitioner if you would like to try one of these.
- **Increase your fluid intake:** Dehydration and not drinking enough fluid can result in larger quantities of water being reabsorbed by the intestine; this causes dry faeces, which tend to stick.
- **Lubricating deodorants:** These are gels which go inside the stoma bag, helping faeces slide to the bottom of the bag.
- **Colostomy irrigation:** It is possible for some people with a colostomy to wash out their bowel regularly with water, to avoid having to wear a bag. Please speak to your Advanced Nurse Practitioner or Specialist Nurse Practitioner, who will be able to tell you if this type of management might work for you.

## Sore skin

This will probably happen to everybody at some stage. The important thing is to work out what the cause of the soreness is, before trying to deal with it. Clean around your stoma with warm water only – no soap. Avoid using baby wipes, as some of these contain lanolin (moisturiser), which can stop the adhesives from sticking. They can also sometimes cause skin soreness.

Never apply any creams which you would usually use for skin complaints elsewhere on your body to the area around your stoma (they won't work and the appliance won't stick!). There are many products available on prescription especially for stoma care, but as a simple, cheap remedy we have found calamine lotion to sometimes be effective.

The following are some common causes of sore skin and simple remedies:

- **The area immediately around the stoma is sore.** This would suggest that the hole in your template needs to be cut smaller, so that none of your skin is exposed. In the first 6-8 weeks after your operation the stoma will shrink in size. The template will need to be adjusted as this happens.
- **Changing the appliance too frequently.** As a general guide, most people with a colostomy change a one-piece bag twice a day. People with an ileostomy would wear a one-piece bag for about three days. Contact your Advanced Nurse Practitioner or Specialist Nurse Practitioner for advice.
- **Poor technique when changing the appliance.** Check you are removing the old appliance correctly; you should support the skin directly above where you are gently peeling the appliance off – from top to bottom. If you are removing your appliance incorrectly, this may cause skin soreness.

Your Advanced Nurse Practitioner or Specialist Nurse Practitioner may recommend adhesive removers if you are using an appliances that is particularly 'sticky'.

Are you cleaning the area well with water and, more importantly, drying the area thoroughly? You may need to use a mirror to help position the new appliance, or might need to change position from standing to sitting, or vice-versa. Do allow time for the appliance to stick properly – simply placing your hand over it for a few minutes works wonders and can prevent accidents later on.

- **Leaving the appliance on too long.** This can also cause your skin to become sore, as the adhesive will start to break down, allowing the waste onto your skin.
- **Weight gain or loss:** This can cause body contours to change, sometimes resulting in skin folds or dips. Contact your Advanced Nurse Practitioner or Specialist Nurse Practitioner, who will be able to give you advice.
- **A skin reaction:** This can sometimes happen in response to a particular product. Contact your Advanced Nurse Practitioner or Specialist Nurse Practitioner as they may be able to suggest an alternative product or a protective skin barrier.
- **Pre-existing skin conditions:** Such as eczema or psoriasis. Contact your Advanced Nurse Practitioner or Specialist Nurse Practitioner, who will be able to give you advice.
- **Inflammation of hair follicles:** This can happen if you have hairy skin on your abdomen. It is best to keep the area around your stoma shaved and hair-free.

If your skin remains sore, please contact your Advanced Nurse Practitioner or Specialist Nurse Practitioner who will be able to help you. The vast majority of skin problems are easily resolved.

## How to contact us

To contact an Advanced Nurse Practitioner or Specialist Nurse Practitioner in Oxford:

Tel: **01865 221 839** or **01865 235 367**  
(9.00am to 5.00pm, Monday to Friday)

If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473** or email **[PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk](mailto:PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk)**

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