

Colorectal Nursing Department

Dietary requirements for people with an ileostomy

Information for patients



This leaflet has been written to give you information on diet after you have had a loop/end ileostomy.

When your colon is either temporarily made to stop working or removed, your body will start to have specific nutritional and fluid requirements. You may feel that the advice given goes against what you believe to be healthy eating, so it is important to understand why it is necessary.

This is a very general advice sheet. The most important thing after you leave hospital is to enjoy an interesting and varied diet and not to follow too strictly any "diet plan". Food is an important part of life and, just because you now have a stoma, this does not mean that your diet should be boring or bland.

Salt

With an ileostomy, you will be losing more salt and fluid. This happens because your colon is not being used and therefore is not absorbing extra fluid. You will need to include a teaspoon of salt a day into your diet. Salt is an essential requirement for your body and low levels of sodium (the main ingredient in salt) can affect how well your heart works. Signs of salt depletion are tingling in the fingers.

If you are also a renal patient, you will need to discuss your salt intake in more detail with your Renal Nurse Specialist, as your salt and fluid requirements may be different.

Potassium

Potassium is another of the essential salts, and is found in bananas, tomatoes, citrus juices, salty crisps, leafy vegetables, potatoes and fish. It is advisable to try and have at least one banana a day.

When you first leave hospital, it is a good idea to eat foods that are fairly easy to digest, such as carbohydrate and protein-based foods. You can then gradually include foods which have more fibre back into your diet. Many people are soon enjoying their usual foods again, such as hot curries! If you know that you are sensitive to certain foods, avoid these – especially in the recovery period. If there is a food you enjoy that doesn't agree with you to start with, do try it again at a later date, as this may change.

Dietary fibre

Dietary fibre or 'roughage' only acts in the colon, to help stool to bind together, so when you have an ileostomy you really don't need any fibre! It won't hurt you if you have it, but it will probably make your stool quite loose. You may also have some gripping abdominal pains, which are caused by excessive wind.

Fruit and vegetables

With an ileostomy, it is essential to eat a wide variety of foods. This should include a selection of fruit and vegetables, as these are high in vitamins and minerals.

Foods that naturally thicken stool

You may find that the output from your stoma is quite liquid, especially during the first couple of weeks after your surgery. Some foods are excellent at thickening the output naturally.

These include carbohydrate-based foods such as:

- bananas
- pasta
- rice
- white bread
- mashed potatoes.

Some people have found eating marshmallows or jelly babies helps firm up their output.

Fluids

You will need to drink plenty of fluids to avoid becoming dehydrated. The recommended amount is 2-2.5 litres per day (a minimum of 8 cups per day). If you are becoming dehydrated it can generally make you feel very unwell. Signs of dehydration include a dry mouth, headache, tiredness and low urine output (very little urine that is very dark).

It is recommended that you should drink extra fluids during hot weather or exercise, or if you have a watery output.

We recommend that you have isotonic drinks, which are higher in salt and sugar. Isotonic fluids are better for you because of the higher sodium (salt) and glucose content. They encourage fluid to be absorbed into your gut, rather than passing straight through into your stoma bag.

These types of drinks include Dioralyte (which you can buy from supermarkets and chemists) and Lucozade Sport or Powerade, or you can make up your own rehydration drink using:

- glucose – 6 flat teaspoons
- salt (sodium chloride) – 1 flat teaspoon
- sodium bicarbonate/citrate – ½ teaspoon
- make up to 1 litre with tap water.

You can flavour this with small amounts of fruit juice.

You will need to drink this solution over 24 hours. If your output remains quite high and watery, you can get the following medication either on prescription or over the counter:

- Loperamide (Imodium) – Contrary to the advice on the packet, with an ileostomy you are advised to take 1-2 tablets half an hour before meals. This can be dissolved with a small amount of water, to help it to be absorbed.

Alcohol

With any stoma it is still possible to enjoy alcoholic beverages, unless your doctor tells you otherwise. Be aware that drinking lager and real ales will produce an excess of wind, due to the hops which are used to make beer. This can be quite uncomfortable and embarrassing. Red wine and beetroot will cause your stools to turn a reddish colour, which can be worrying, but this is normal. Some people report slight abdominal pain and increased output after drinking red wine. White wine and spirits do not tend to have so many reported effects. Remember to drink in moderation and observe the safe limits: Men and women are advised not to regularly drink more than 14 units a week. Spread your drinking over three days or more if you drink as much as 14 units a week.

For guidance:

1 small glass of wine (125ml) = 1.5 units

Pint of lager/beer/cider = 3 units

1 bottle of alcopop = 1.5 units

Single shot of spirit = 1 unit

Some wines and beers have a higher alcohol content than others, but most bottles and cans now show the units that they contain.

Further information about the recommended weekly intake of alcohol can be found on the NHS Choices website:

Website: www.nhs.uk/Livewell/alcohol/Pages/alcohol-units.aspx

What foods should I avoid?

Nuts – these can actually form a plug and block an ileostomy, so be careful to avoid eating them (nuts that are processed in food products are usually fine).

The skin of fruit and vegetables, as well as mushrooms, sweetcorn and celery, are all very difficult to digest. We recommend that these types of foods are eaten in moderation and chewed well.

How to contact us

If you have any questions about your diet or concerns about what to eat, please contact the Advanced Nurse Practitioner or Specialist Nurse Practitioner.

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

Email: **colorectal.nursing@ouh.nhs.uk**

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**

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