

# Body changes, washing, clothing and returning to normal activities after your stoma surgery

Information for patients

## **Body image**

It is completely normal not to immediately feel at ease and comfortable with your stoma. It is something completely new for you and it will take time for you to come to terms with the change to your body image.

Some people feel very emotional after major surgery. If possible, try to have someone at home with you who can give you some support in the early days after your discharge.

If you have a partner, close family member or friend, try to talk through your feelings and anxieties with them, as this often helps. Things will improve but, as with any major change, this takes time.

## **Body hair**

It is essential to keep the area around your stoma hair-free, to make sure that the appliance sticks well. If you are male, you will probably need to shave the area once or twice a week. We do not advise that you use any shaving creams, as you may develop a skin reaction. This can cause soreness around the stoma and difficulty when applying the bag.

Try to shave in the direction that your hairs are growing, to avoid irritation to your skin. Some ostomists (people with a stoma) report that using a very good quality razor gives the best results and reduces skin irritation.

## **Bathing and showering**

It is fine to have a bath or shower with your stoma bag on, if you prefer. Remember that the adhesive is designed to actually stick more tightly when exposed to water, so it may be better to change your bag before you bathe or shower. If you are having a bath, it is always best to empty or change your bag beforehand, to stop it from floating in the water.

Many people with a colostomy have a shower or bath without a bag on. This is perfectly safe. Some people worry about water entering their body. This is very unlikely to happen and certainly would not hurt you if it did. If you are worried about your stoma when you are showering, a good tip is to use a stoma cap to cover it, to prevent irritation. If you are bathing, you may prefer to keep your bag on, in case your stoma is active when you are in the bath and leaks stool into the water.

If you have an ileostomy, we would advise you to keep your bag on during bathing, but you can remove it for a shower.

If your bag has a filter on it, then cover the filter with one of the sticky labels provided in the box. This will prevent water from clogging the filter. Remove the label after bathing.

## Clothing

Many people with stomas don't find that they need to change their style of dress. However, the following tips may be useful.

You may find it more comfortable to wear braces rather than a belt with trousers, depending on where your stoma is positioned. Some companies make trousers and skirts with a 'higher waist', or you may find it better to choose a style with pleats at the waistband to help conceal the bag, but this is a personal choice.

The Colostomy Association has a list of higher waist trouser and skirt suppliers:

Website: **[www.colostomyassociation.org.uk](http://www.colostomyassociation.org.uk)**

Tel: **01189 391 537**

Helpline: **0800 328 4257**

There are also companies that make swimwear especially for people with stomas; such as men's shorts cut higher on the waist and women's costumes designed to conceal the bag. Speak to your Advanced Nurse Practitioner or Specialist Nurse Practitioner for details, or contact the Colostomy Association.

It is also possible to buy suitable swimwear on the high street. For women, it is probably better to go for a costume with a design or pattern, rather than a plain one. Many high street costumes now have a lining built in, which can help to support the appliance. For men, swimming shorts are best, rather than tight trunks.

There are companies that make specially designed underwear for both men and women with a stoma. Please speak to your Advanced Nurse Practitioner or Specialist Nurse Practitioner, or contact the Colostomy Association for details.

Sometimes a 'pocket' is built in to the underwear, to support the appliance. Support garments are also available, such as wraps and vests, which give you support as well as being discrete.

Many women find Sloggi™ pants comfortable and supportive (available online and on the high street), but there are other high street brands that are also recommended. Lycra-type 'bodies' or vest tops are useful for giving a sleek appearance, as well as being supportive (for those without a bag as well!).

Smaller bags are available for those times when you want your appliance to be more discrete (such as for intimate moments and sporting activities). Please ask your Advanced Nurse Practitioner or Specialist Nurse Practitioner for more details.

## **Tiredness**

You may be surprised at how very tired you will feel when you go home. This is completely normal.

After having an operation, your body will need more energy to help the healing process. Eating little and often is recommended, as this helps to refuel your energy requirements frequently.

It is often helpful to plan your day, so that you have time to rest and still do the things you want to do most. During the first couple of weeks, family, friends, neighbours and social workers may be able to help you to manage your everyday activities.

It is very important to increase the amount of activities or tasks you do yourself. This will help you to get back to your normal level of activity and will build up your energy levels. Set yourself aims each day to achieve and soon you will be able to return to your previous activities, when you feel you are ready.

## 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](mailto:colorectal.nursing@ouh.nhs.uk)**



## Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

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[www.ouh.nhs.uk/information](http://www.ouh.nhs.uk/information)



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