

Caring for Your Ostomy

Introduction

You may have many concerns and questions as you recover from your ostomy surgery. This booklet includes information that will help answer your questions as they arise, and reinforce the instructions you received during your stay at Roswell Park Cancer Institute. The Enterostomal (ET) Nurse, who specializes in ostomy care, is available to answer questions or assess problems you may have about caring for your ostomy.

Our goal is to help you gain the confidence needed to care for your ostomy at home. Dealing with all aspects of your illness can become overwhelming. Remember, you are not alone. Someone is here to help you return to a normal way of life. Support services are only a telephone call away.

Stoma Care

- The stoma should be pink/red and moist.
- The stoma may be swollen at first and its size and shape will change over the next 8 weeks. Adjust the wafer opening as needed to accommodate these changes.
- Clean the stoma gently with cool water; vigorous rubbing will cause bleeding. If bleeding occurs, apply gentle pressure with a cold washcloth until it stops. If it doesn't stop, contact your physician.
- If blood thinners are prescribed, avoid trauma and hot water to stoma.

Skin Care

- Skin care is essential for ostomy care.
- Each time you change your appliance (pouch and wafer) check your skin for hair, redness, irritation, rashes, sores, or ulcers. If any are present, refer to *Troubleshooting Guidelines in this booklet*.
- Use a soft washcloth or paper towels and mild soapy water to clean your skin.
- Avoid pre-moistened baby wipes and soaps with oil/moisturizers. These can leave residues on your skin and interfere with the adherence of your pouching system.
- Trim body hair around the stoma with an electric razor or rounded end scissors every week.
- Dry skin well with a paper towel or hair dryer set on the COOL setting before applying new wafer.
- A cloth pouch cover placed over the pouch or a cotton cloth placed between the pouch and your skin will help prevent skin irritation caused by excessive perspiration under the plastic pouch.

Bathing and Showering

- Showers may be taken with the ostomy appliance on or off. Be aware that your stool may drain from the stoma while the appliance is off. Avoid harsh massage jets or forceful water directly on the stoma.
- Wear the ostomy appliance while bathing, swimming, or in hot tubs.

Clothing

- You should be able to wear the same clothing you wore before surgery.
- Avoid clothing that puts direct pressure on the stoma.
- Avoid tight belts and large belt buckles over or near the stoma.
- Wear stretch underwear to support the pouch during physical activity.
- The pouch can be placed inside or outside your underwear, whichever is more comfortable.
- Girdles and pantyhose should be one size larger.
- Bathing suits with print design, skirts and/or ruffles will help conceal the ostomy appliance. Print or design shirts and layered clothing also help conceal the appliance.

Food and Beverages

- You can resume your normal diet following surgery if there is no medical reason for a special diet.
- Refer to *Diet for the Ileostomy* booklet.

Medication

- Do not take over-the-counter medications or products for antidiarrheal or constipation unless prescribed by your physician.
- If you discover a prescribed medication at the bottom of your pouch, the pill may not have been absorbed entirely in your digestive system. Consult your pharmacist and/or physician.
- Some medications and foods may alter the color and /or consistency of the stool. For example, vitamins may turn the stool black; eating beets may turn the stool red.
- Discuss your medications with your pharmacist.

Odor/Gas

- The pouch is odor proof when closed.
- Keep the pouch opening clean to decrease odor.
- Apply 12 drops of odor eliminator deodorant into the pouch each time you empty it.
- Spray air freshener in the bathroom before emptying the pouch.
- Certain foods may produce excessive gas for some individuals and minimal gas for others.
- Tips to minimize gas production:
 - Avoid drinking through a straw.
 - Avoid smoking.
 - Avoid waiting longer than five hours to eat.
 - Sitting in an upright position during meals and for 1 hour afterwards.
 - Limit carbonated beverages and/or gas producing foods.
 - Cooked vegetables produce less gas than raw ones.
- You may incorporate an anti-gas medication in your diet.
- Refer to the diet booklets for information on odor and gas.

Activity, Exercise, and Sports

- Ostomy surgery should not prevent you from exercising or being physically active again.
- After a 6 week recovery period, you may increase activity level moderately, as tolerated, and as directed by your surgeon.
- Do not lift more than 8 pounds (a gallon of milk = 8 lbs.) for the first 6 weeks after surgery to prevent a hernia.
- When lifting and/or using abdominal muscles, an ostomy support belt is strongly recommended to prevent a hernia. The ostomy support belt will need to be fitted and a prescription is required. The belt can be obtained wherever you get your ostomy supplies.
- Exercise, sports, and swimming are excellent activities to improve strength and physical well-being. Rough, contact sports should be avoided.
- You may put tape around the edge of your wafer for support before swimming.
- Empty your pouch before swimming or activities.

Returning to Work

- After a 6 week recovery period, your physician will evaluate when you can return to work.
- Always keep extra supplies at work or in a briefcase. Be sure to store equipment at room temperature.

Traveling

- When traveling, take at least twice the amount of supplies you'll need with you.
- When flying, carry your supplies with you. Do not place supplies in checked luggage or in a storage compartment.
- Pre-cut your products before flying and store your scissors in your checked luggage.
- Place your seatbelt above or below your stoma.
- Carry identification specifying your particular ostomy and equipment.
- Carry a list of United Ostomy Association chapters and/or your manufacturer's toll-free number in your travel case. These are excellent resources if assistance is needed when traveling.
- When traveling to warmer climates, heat and moisture can decrease your wear time.

Personal Relationships

- Having an ostomy will not interfere with social, personal, and/or intimate relationships. Your sexual well-being was a part of you before surgery and cannot be removed in an operation.
- Intimacy and sexual relationships may resume after the 6 week recovery period. Your physician will let you know if you have any restrictions and/or limitations.
- Empty your pouch before intimate moments.
- A beige pouch or pouch cover can conceal pouch contents.
- Intimate apparel is available that conceal and support the pouch.
- Counseling is available if you have questions or concerns. Contact our Social Work Department for further assistance at **716-845-8022**.

Ostomy Equipment & Storage

- You will be fitted for an appropriate appliance after surgery and taught how to use it.
- There are many ostomy equipment options available. If your current system is adhering for five to seven days, continue to use this system. A weight gain or loss of 10 to 15 lbs. and/or an allergic reaction to the equipment may indicate a need to change the system. Please contact your ET nurse for assistance.
- Be sure to keep enough supplies on hand to allow for delivery time of your next order of supplies.
- Change the appliance (pouch and wafer) every five to seven days. Date the wafer or mark the day on your calendar. If your appliance is not lasting five to seven days, please contact your ET Nurse for assistance.
- Empty your pouch when it is 1/3 full.
- Pouch covers are available at medical supply stores. They may be beneficial if the plastic pouch irritates your skin.
- Use a plastic mattress cover if you are concerned about soiling your bed.
- Store unused items in the original box in a cool, dry place.
- Periodically check expiration dates on unused equipment.
- Contact the equipment manufacturer at the toll-free number to replace defective equipment.

Insurance

- Check with your health insurance company regarding coverage for your ostomy supplies.
- A prescription for your supplies will be provided when you are discharged from the hospital.
- Call several medical supply stores and/or home delivery companies for competitive pricing.

Ordering Supplies

- It is important to find a supplier as soon as possible. When you are discharged from the hospital, you will be provided supplies for 2-3 weeks.
- You can get ostomy equipment from your pharmacy, medical supply store, or home delivery company.
- Order ostomy equipment before your supply diminishes, allowing enough time for delivery.
- Keep a list of equipment, product numbers, manufacturers, and suppliers at home. Give a copy to a family member/friend.

Troubleshooting Guidelines

If you are having trouble with your ostomy or stoma, see the chart on the next page.

Problem	Description	Cause	Remedy
SKIN IRRITATION <i>Rash</i>	Fine, raised, red rash around stoma or under wafer	Moisture under wafer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dry skin well before applying wafer. • Use hair dryer on cool setting to dry area (skin and wafer). • Change appliance 1 day sooner.
		Opening of wafer is too large; skin exposed to drainage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check pattern size. • If appliance leaks, change immediately.
	Red rash, irritation, itching, or burning under the entire wafer	Allergy to wafer or tape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply skin prep to skin before applying wafer. • If rash does not clear up in 5-7 days, a different type of pouching system may be required.
	Fine red rash, irritation under plastic pouch	Moisture under pouch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pouch cover will keep plastic appliance off skin. • Place appliance on outside of undergarment. • Apply powder or cornstarch under the appliance (not under wafer).
<i>Irritated Hair Follicles (Folliculitis)</i>	Raised red areas under wafer that look similar to acne	Removing hair by aggressively pulling wafer off	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shave hair around stoma with an electric razor with each appliance change. • Use adhesive remover to remove old wafer. • Apply skin prep to skin before applying wafer. • Kenalog spray may be applied to the affected area.
LEAKAGE	Wafer loses its seal on skin; drainage leaks under water	Incorrect opening in wafer	Check pattern size before cutting wafer.
	Pouch wear time less than 5 days	Liquid stool or urine can melt down the skin barrier on the wafer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After removing wafer, examine for meltdown. • Changing to a more durable wafer may be necessary. • Contact ET nurses
	Stool or urine leaks from sides of wafer	Skin folds/creases develop around stoma	A protective skin barrier paste applied to the back of the wafer acts as a caulking to fill in skin folds or creases.
		Stoma retracts (pulls in) when in sitting position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the stoma retracts, a convex (curved) wafer may be necessary. • Apply an ostomy appliance belt to provide added security.

Problem	Description	Cause	Remedy
HERNIA IMPORTANT Hernia/ ostomy belt needs to be snug, NOT constricting. Apply when lying down.	Abdomen bulges around stoma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak abdominal muscles • Lifting heavy objects too soon after surgery 	Preventing a hernia is the best remedy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not lift over 8lbs in the first 8 weeks after surgery. • Once healing is complete, begin abdominal exercises to build muscle tone. • Ostomy/hernia support belts are recommended for strenuous activity, and are available at the pharmacy.
CUT ON STOMA	Cuts on stoma appear as a yellow or white line	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wafer opening too small • Wafer not centered over stoma 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check pattern size. • Enlarge wafer opening as needed. • Sitting or standing facing a wall mirror may allow a better view of the stoma.
	Bleeding may also occur from cut on stoma	Tight-fitting clothing may cause excessive pressure against the stoma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alter clothing to accommodate stoma. • To control bleeding, apply cold cloth with light pressure for 2-3 min. • Contact physician if bleeding persists. • Silver nitrate may be applied to site.

Contact your physician if:

- you have symptoms of a urinary tract infection such as blood in your urine and general weakness
- there is persistent bleeding from your stoma
- the appearance of your stoma changes such as persistent swelling, color change other than pink/red, remarkable decrease in size
- you have decreased ostomy output with nausea or vomiting
- you have diarrhea, watery stool, or constipation for more than 24 hours

Contact your ET Nurse if:

- the appliance is not fitting properly or not lasting 5 to 7 days
- skin surrounding the stoma becomes red, sore, or blistered
- you have any questions about ostomy care, diet, exercise, or support group referrals

Contact Numbers

- **ET nurses:** Kathleen O’Hearn RN, MSN, CWOCN, Michelle Dalka RN, BSN, CWOCN, Meganne Conrad RN, BSN, CWOCN, and Amy Menegay, RN, BSN, CWOCN: **716-845-1301**
- Roswell Park Ostomy Support Group: **716-845-1301**
- Roswell Park Social Work Dept.: **716-845-8022**
- United Ostomy Association: **1-800-826-0826**
- American Cancer Society: **1-800-ACS-2345**