

Diet advice for patients with a stoma



There are two different types of stoma; a **colostomy** or an **ileostomy**.

A **colostomy** is a stoma that is formed from a part of the large bowel (colon). When undigested food enters the colon, water is absorbed from it and stool (poo) is stored in the colon until it is passed out via the stoma. The type of stool that comes from a colostomy can be liquid or more solid in consistency. It is important to drink enough fluids and eat foods that are rich in fibre to make sure you do not become constipated.

An **ileostomy** is a stoma that is formed from a part of the small bowel (ileum). The type of stool that comes from an ileostomy is generally more liquid in consistency than stool that comes from a colostomy. Your large bowel normally absorbs water, if this has been removed or you have an ileostomy, the faeces coming through the stoma will be watery, so it is important to drink enough fluids or you may get dehydrated.

Do I need to follow a special diet now I have a stoma?

It can take 6-8 weeks for your bowels to adapt after having your surgery. During this time you may need to follow a lower fibre diet, and initially, you may find that some foods upset you. It is important that you try new foods during this period and have as varied a diet as possible. Everyone is different and it is 'trial and error' finding out which foods suit you. If a food does upset you, do not be put off and try the food again in a few weeks. Once your stoma begins to adapt and you are used to its function, you will feel more confident to experience with food.

You should base your food choices on your personal tolerance. ONLY avoid foods if they cause symptoms.

In the long term, you should be able to return to a balanced diet as outlined by the Eat Well Plate below.



Diet for colostomy

Aim to eat a 'normal' balanced diet.

Drink plenty of fluids (around 1.5 litre per day); this does not have to be just water.

Fibre should be introduced slowly to the diet as it may increase wind and bloating. A diet low in fibre and fluid can lead to constipation or blockage.

People with colostomies may also experience episodes of diarrhoea caused by foods, and some foods may cause problems such as wind, odour or loose stools;

therefore you may choose to consume these foods in moderation. Go to the section '**which foods may cause diarrhoea**' for more information on this.

Diet for ileostomy

Most nutrients are absorbed in the upper small bowel, so patients with ileostomies can generally follow a balance diet.

Even though it is possible to live well without a colon, you need to ensure you drink enough fluid and have some salt in your diet. You may not need to take additional salt if your diet includes some salty or processed foods.

Those with ileostomies often follow a low-fibre diet. However, it is important to eat some fruit and vegetables, which should be chewed well to reduce the risk of blockage. Removing food skins, pips, seeds and pith will reduce the chance of diarrhoea. Another option is to use tinned or well-cooked fruit and vegetables.

What do I do if my stoma blocks?

A blockage can occur if foods are not well chewed. Signs of a blocked stoma can be:

- Lack of stools
- Very watery stools
- Abdominal pain
- Nausea and vomiting
- Bloating

To avoid blockages, for the first 6-8 weeks, people with newly formed stomas should avoid foods such as:

- Dried fruit, raw fruit, fruit skins and pith
- Coconut, nuts and seeds
- Pips
- Raw vegetables, salad and vegetable skins
- Peas
- Mushrooms
- Sweetcorn

These foods can then be re-introduced to the diet in small, well-chewed portions.

If your stoma blocks, stop eating but continue to drink fluids to help pass the blockage. If symptoms persist for more than 12 hours call your GP or stoma nurse, especially if you have pain or vomiting.

How much should I drink?

You should aim to drink 6-8 cups of fluid each day. You may need to drink more during hot weather or when you exercise.

People with an ileostomy may also have a high stool (poo) output. This is usually temporary. If the output exceeds 2 litres per day it may lead to dehydration. If your

stoma output remains high, you may have to drink less and have a special fluid to drink called St Marks's or WHO solution, which your Doctor or Dietitian may suggest.

Alcohol may cause loose stools, so you may choose to avoid it. If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation; 3 or 4 units per day or less for man, and 2 or 3 units per day for women, with at least one or two alcohol free days per week.

How do I know if I am drinking enough?

Look out for the following signs of dehydration:

- Lower urine output
- Dark urine
- Feeling thirsty
- A dry mouth and skin

Foods that may cause loose stools/diarrhoea

- Fruit juice
- Fruits, vegetables and salad
- Fish
- High fat foods
- Bran cereals
- Alcohol
- Spicy foods
- Nuts
- Coconuts
- Chocolate
- Caffeinated drinks

Foods that may cause odour

- Cucumber
- Peas
- Onions
- Beans and pulses
- Garlic
- Brassica vegetables
- Alcohol
- Fizzy drinks
- Chewing gum
- Radishes
- Nuts

How can I reduce wind?

People with stomas have no voluntary control over when they pass wind, which can be embarrassing. Wind is produced as part of the digestive process and from swallowed air:

- Try drinking fennel or peppermint tea
- Eating yogurt may help
- Gradually introduce fibre containing foods into your diet

Swallowed air can be reduced by:

- Eating slowly
- Chewing food well
- Avoiding talking while eating
- Avoiding smoking
- Avoiding chewing gum
- Avoiding drinking with a straw

How can I decrease or thicken stoma output?

Some people find that these foods can help to thicken output:

- Ripe banana
- Boiled rice or pasta
- Cheese
- Instant mash potato
- Marshmallows
- Pasta
- Creamy/smooth peanut butter
- Jelly babies
- Ready brek
- Toast
- Apple sauce

What should I do if I am losing weight?

After your operation you may not feel like eating. However it is important to make sure you are getting enough energy to help your body heal.

Tips to increase your intake of energy and protein to minimise weight loss:

- Aim to drink one pint of full fat milk per day and try adding 2-4 tablespoons of dried milk powder to it
- Eat small regular meals and have snacks in between
- Add extra oil or ghee to meals, curries and rice
- Have milk puddings such as rice pudding, sag, shrikhund, sero with extra cream
- Try drinking milky drinks such as Indian tea, lassi, hot chocolate, Ovaltine, Meritene or Complian

If you have any other problems with your stoma such as:

- Persistent or unusually loose stools
- Constipation
- Restrictive diet
- Unplanned weight loss

Please contact your GP, Stoma Nurse or Dietitian.