

Patient Information Leaflet



Dietary Advice for
people with a Colostomy

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The Burdett Institute
of Gastrointestinal Nursing



Dietary Advice for people with a Colostomy

After formation of your colostomy you will continue to digest and absorb all nutrients normally in your small bowel. The length of the large bowel (colon) that was resected (removed) (if any) during your surgery will affect the amount of water and salt that is absorbed in your colon. The more colon you have had removed, the looser your colostomy output will be.

The diet expected in the long term for a colostomy is a general healthy diet. Most colostomates can eat, within reason, any foods or drinks. However, constipation may be an issue and dietary measures (or drugs such as laxatives) may have to be taken to prevent this occurring. It is impossible to provide absolute advice as everyone likes and reacts differently to different foods, so this is to be a guide only. Most importantly enjoy your food.

It follows, therefore, that you will be able to maintain good health by taking a varied diet with an adequate fluid intake.

This booklet includes:

- information about the re-introduction of food for those with a new colostomy
- guidelines to help you choose a healthy diet
- guidance about diet in relation to developing acceptable colostomy function.

Whilst the experience of others may serve as a guide, remember that as an individual you may respond differently to food, both before and after surgery, therefore, you should base food choices on your own personal tolerance.

Please note that the advice included in this booklet is not suitable for those with an ileostomy. If you are unsure, please consult your doctor, stoma care nurse or dietitian.

Colostomy diet after surgery

Immediately after surgery the bowel can be very different to usual and this may last for several weeks. It is important to commence food and drinks slowly. Each person is different so no precise information is possible, but immediately after surgery it is normal to take sips of water (if there is no nausea). As this is tolerated, increase gradually to any type of fluid, including tea, coffee, soup and jelly. Once this is tolerated a light diet should be started, including foods such as cornflakes, mashed potato, mince, fish, plain omelette, white bread, butter, ice cream, jelly, mousse and rice pudding. Then eventually all food types can be tried. This process often takes several weeks after surgery.

It is important immediately after surgery to have protein to help your wounds heal and carbohydrates to give you energy.

Meal pattern

Meal pattern is very individual and may be affected by social circumstances.

- Try to develop a regular eating pattern for acceptable colostomy function
- Smaller meals may be better tolerated, particularly in the first few weeks, but in this case it is important to eat more often to ensure an adequate intake
- Take your time and chew food thoroughly
- Avoid heavy meals or snacks before bedtime
- Avoid alcohol and caffeine drinks before bedtime i.e. coffee, cola and tea

Re-introduction of food after formation of a new colostomy

After surgery it is important to take a well-balanced diet to help healing and to enable you to regain any weight lost before surgery.

As with any operation, you may find that it takes time for your appetite to return, especially if you were unwell before surgery. It is a good idea to reintroduce food gradually, starting with a soft, nutritious diet that is easy to digest.

- Include protein foods such as meat, fish, eggs, cheese and milk to help wound healing.

- Eat starch carbohydrates such as white bread, low fibre cereals like rice crispies or cornflakes, potatoes (no skins) and white rice/pasta for energy and to help thicken your colostomy output.
- If your appetite is poor, take smaller meals with snacks in-between, such as cereal, sandwiches, cheese and crackers, yoghurts or nutritious drinks like milk, Complan, Build-up or other supplements as recommended by your dietitian.
- Choose plainly cooked foods and avoid spicy or highly seasoned dishes, fried foods and fibrous foods (see next section).
- Eat slowly and chew your food well.

Fibrous Foods

Fibrous foods such as wholemeal bread and vegetable skins are difficult to digest and may cause a blockage if they are eaten in large quantities or not well chewed when your bowel is still swollen following surgery and should therefore be gradually re-introduced into your diet.

Fluids

It may take some time for your colostomy output to settle down and it may be loose for a short while. To prevent dehydration occurring, once you are able to drink following your operation, you should try and ensure that you have an adequate fluid intake. This should be continued long term, unless any other health condition indicates otherwise. You should aim to take:

- At least eight to 10 cups of fluid per day, this is 1 ½ - 2 litres (3-4 pints) daily and can include water, tea, coffee and squashes.

As your colostomy settles your output will become thicker but you still should continue to ensure that you have an adequate fluid intake.

Dietary advice for people with an established colostomy

Once your colostomy begins to adapt and you become used to its normal function, you will feel more confident to experiment with food and many people find they can enjoy a full and varied diet.

Choosing a healthy diet

No one food contains all the nutrients needed for health so you should choose a variety of foods from each of the following groups to achieve an adequate intake (this may

be modified by your dietitian if you are under or over weight).

Protein foods

These are essential for health and repair of body tissues.

Examples include:

- meat – beef, pork, bacon, lamb, liver, kidney
- poultry – chicken, turkey
- fish
- eggs
- beans, baked beans, peas, lentils
- nut products such as peanut butter or ground nuts
- meat alternatives – textured vegetable protein, Quorn and tofu

Include two portions from this list each day. Try to cook foods without adding extra fat.

Red meats, liver, kidney, oily fish, eggs and pulses are good sources of iron, which is important for healthy blood, so try to include these regularly.

Dairy Produce

Milk, cheese and yoghurt are good sources of calcium, which is important for healthy bones. These foods also provide protein and some vitamins.

Try to take ½ - 1 pint (300-600ml) of milk each day or its equivalent as cheese or yoghurt. One cup of milk (1/3 pint or 200ml) contains the same amount of calcium as one small carton of yoghurt (150 ml) or 1oz/30g of cheese, so these may be taken as alternatives to milk.

Choose lower fat alternatives whenever you can.

Starchy foods

These provide energy, vitamins and fibre.

Examples include:

- bread, chapattis
- breakfast cereals, oats
- pasta
- rice
- potatoes, sweet potatoes
- plantains, green bananas, yam
- dishes made with maize, millet and corn meal

These foods are reported to help thicken your colostomy output. Include a variety of foods from this group and make them the main part of your meals. The high fibre versions should be tried to reduce the risk of constipation.

Fruit and vegetables

These provide fibre and a range of vitamins and minerals that are essential for good health.

- Choose a wide variety
- Try to eat five portions per day

A portion is two tablespoons of vegetables, a small salad, a piece of fruit like an apple or banana, two tablespoons of stewed/tinned fruit or a small glass (150ml) of fruit juice.

If you find that some fruits and vegetables upset you, then try:

- peeled fruits
- tinned fruits in natural juice
- stewed, baked or pureed fruits
- fruit juices (unsweetened)
- well cooked or pureed vegetables
- vegetables in soup or casseroles, pureed if necessary

Fats and oils

These provide energy, essential fats and some vitamins, but too much fat is not good for health so use the following foods sparingly:

- butter
- margarine
- low fat spreads
- cooking oils
- mayonnaise and oily salad dressings

Fats and sugar

The following foods contain fats and sugars and may be enjoyed as a treat, but try not to eat them too often and, when you do, have small amounts.

- cakes, biscuits
- puddings, ice cream
- chocolate, sweets
- crisps
- sugar, sweetened drinks

Alcohol

Excessive amounts of alcohol are not good for health. Some types, such as beer may increase your colostomy output.

If you drink alcohol, take it in moderation: three or four units/day or less for men and two or three units per day for women, with one or two alcohol-free days.

One unit is equal to half a pint of beer, a single pub measure of spirit (25ml), a small glass of sherry or a small glass of wine (125ml).

Common questions asked by patients about food and their colostomies

Can I eat spicy foods?

Spicy foods such as chilli and curry, may upset your colostomy function so we recommend that in the first few weeks you choose mild food. After this time you may introduce more spicy food if you wish.

I'm experiencing a lot of wind. What causes this?

At first your stoma will pass more wind (flatus) than usual, but this soon reduces, especially once you begin to eat 'normally'.

Wind is a normal by product of digestion, but it may be increased by swallowing air whilst eating or by eating fibrous foods.

You may reduce wind caused by swallowed air by:

- eating regular meals in a relaxed environment
- eating slowly and chewing food carefully
- pouring fizzy drinks (if taken) into a glass, stirring and leaving to stand for 10 minutes before drinking.

You should also avoid:

- taking drinks through a straw.
- long periods without food.
- smoking
- talking when eating
- chewing gum

Bacteria fermentation

When the residue of fibrous foods reaches the colon the bacteria ferment it to break it down into waste. This is a normal part of digestion but may cause some wind.

Foods and drinks may increase the wind passed by your colostomy e.g. beans, beer, broccoli, brussel sprouts, cabbage, carbonated drinks, cauliflower, cucumber, eggs, fruit, green vegetables, mushrooms, nuts, onions, peas, spinach, sweet corn, fatty foods (pan-fried or deep-fried foods) and/or rich creamy foods.

You may reduce wind caused by fibrous foods by:

- trying low fibre alternatives such as white bread, white rice and pasta, refined cereals such as cornflakes and rice crispies.
- reducing your intake of pulses (e.g. peas, beans, lentils), vegetables (e.g. cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, sprouts, onions, leeks, asparagus), fruits, especially skins, pith, hard or dried fruit, nuts and seeds.
- peppermint water, peppermint tea or capsules may assist in reducing wind and may alleviate pain associated with wind.
- try live yoghurt or other fermented drinks.

Remember that you do need fibre to prevent constipation.

Remember also that people are very individual and foods which may upset one person, may be well tolerated by

another. Try all foods and only avoid those that repeatedly cause problems for you. Do remember that modern appliances have filters in them to release the air from the colostomy bag.

To eliminate flatus why not consider colostomy irrigation, although this is not suitable for all (you would need to be assessed by your stoma care nurse and gain consent from your surgeon).

I sometimes experience a more liquid output. Which foods may cause this?

Certain foods may make your colostomy output more liquid especially if eaten in large quantities e.g. fibrous foods (wholemeal bread, wholegrain cereals, pulses, leafy green vegetables, raw vegetables, sweet corn, fruits and nuts), spicy foods, alcohol, drinks containing caffeine (e.g. coffee, tea, cola), fruit juices and fried foods.

If you eat any of these foods in large quantities, you may wish to try reducing the quantity that you eat to see if this thickens your colostomy output.

What should I do if I get diarrhoea?

Diarrhoea can be a result of a variety of things, such as a stomach bug, stress, antibiotics or spicy foods. If you experience diarrhoea it is important to continue to take fluids and to add salt to your diet (as salt is lost in very loose colostomy outputs). If you are unable to eat meals, try taking salt in the form of meat extract drinks such as

Oxo or Bovril and eat dry savoury crackers. If your diarrhoea persists for two days, seek medical advice from your GP.

If you irrigate you need to stop irrigating until the diarrhoea stops.

Occasionally people with a colostomy are prone to loose stool. Foods that may cause you to have loose stool are beer or other alcohol, broccoli, chocolate, fresh fruit (except bananas), grape juice, green beans, prunes or prune juice, spicy foods, spinach, some artificial sweeteners i.e. sorbitol.

Other colostomates have found that foods that may help thicken the stool may include bananas, cheese, marshmallows, (boiled) milk, noodles, smooth creamy peanut butter, rice, tapioca pudding and toast.

I sometimes see food particles in my bag is this normal?

Yes sometimes food will pass through unaltered, particularly foods such as sweet corn.

What happens if I get constipated?

Constipation may be seen as two or less bowel motions a week. Constipation is largely due to lack of dietary fibre, inadequate fluid intake and some types of painkillers or immobility.

To prevent constipation:

- eat regularly
- increase the amount of fruit and vegetables
- change to wholemeal or granary bread, brown chapatti or high fibre white bread
- change to wholemeal cereals e.g. bran flakes, Weetabix, shredded wheat or porridge
- try brown rice or pasta
- take gentle exercise
- ensure that you drink 1 ½ - 2 litres (three or four pints) daily, unless specifically advised otherwise.

Foods that may cause you to have looser stool, see previous may be useful.

My colostomy output is offensive smelling. Is there anything I can do to prevent this?

Certain foods can cause more odour than others. Foods such as asparagus, baked beans, broccoli, brussel sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, cucumber, eggs, fish, garlic, green vegetables, onions, peanut butter, some spices and strong cheeses may cause a problem for some people. You may wish to try omitting these foods to see if this reduces the problem, but remember that you can only smell the faeces when you change your appliance.

There are foods that help to reduce the odour from your colostomy. Peppermint oil capsules, yoghurt, parsley and buttermilk can help to reduce the smell for some people. A soluble aspirin or some vanilla essence can be

placed in the colostomy bag to prevent troublesome odours.

Vinegar added to fish dishes helps to eliminate the traditional fishy odour and also helps to get rid of fish smells when the bag is changed.

Alternately, you could try ostomy deodorant sprays and drops that can help mask or eliminate odours. Ask your stoma care nurse for advice about these.

Will my colostomy increase my risk of food poisoning whilst on holiday abroad?

You are no more at risk of food poisoning than a person who does not have a colostomy. However, you should follow the guidelines on food hygiene for the country you are visiting.

It may be useful to take a few drainable bags with you in case of diarrhoea.

SUMMARY

- People with a new colostomy may find that it takes several months for the stoma to settle down, including odour and wind.
- Take a varied and well balanced diet for good health, which is low in fat and moderate in fibre.
- Ensure an adequate fluid intake to prevent dehydration.
- Develop a regular eating pattern for acceptable colostomy function.
- Try all foods and only avoid those that repeatedly cause unacceptable symptoms.
- Colostomates do not usually have any dietary restrictions at all.

USEFUL ADDRESSES

Colostomy Association

PO Box 8017

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Berkshire, RG6 9DF

Tel: 01189867597

Helpline: 08005876744

www.colostomyassociation.org.uk

email: cass@colostomyassociation.org.uk

Inside Out Stoma Support Group

218 Long Elmes

Harrow Weald

Middlesex HA3 6LG

email: insideout.bag256@btinternet.com

Bowel Cancer UK

7 Rickett Street

London, SW6 1RU

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admin@bowelcanceruk.org.uk

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20 Queen Street

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Advisory Service: 08708506050

<http://www.bowelcanceruk.org.uk>

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