

Healthy Eating

Guidelines on nutritional
management for people
with a colostomy



Freephone helpline:
0800 328 4257

Healthy Eating

What should I eat?

By the time food reaches the colon, it has been almost completely digested, so having a colostomy does not mean you will have to change what you eat.

It is not necessary to follow a special diet (unless you have been advised to do so by your doctor for another specific medical condition). Try, as far as possible, to eat a diet containing a variety of items from all the food groups illustrated in the diagram below. This will ensure that your body receives all the essential nutrients (protein, carbohydrate, fat, vitamins and minerals) it needs.

Healthy Diet Options

- **Fruit and vegetables**
Choose a wide variety

- **Bread, other cereals and potatoes**
Eat all types. Choose high fibre kinds whenever you can



- **Meat, fish and alternatives**
Choose lower fat alternatives whenever you can

- **Fatty and sugary foods**
Try not to eat these too often and, when you do, have small amounts

- **Milk and dairy foods**
Choose lower fat alternatives whenever you can

Should I eat more fibre and less fat?

Bear in mind that, although current advice is to eat more fibre and less fat:

- too much fibre (e.g. pulses and bran based cereals) may cause wind or loose motions.
- if you are trying to regain lost weight, it may be better to use full fat milk and cheese, rather than semi-skimmed or skimmed alternatives.

Are there any foods colostomates should avoid?

We are all different. Some colostomates can eat anything. Others have found, by experience, that it is best to avoid certain foods.

If you suspect a food causes problems, try it at least three times, separated by an interval of at least a week, before eliminating it altogether.

If you find you are cutting out most of the items in any one of the food groups shown in the diagram, then it is advisable to seek individual dietary advice. Your GP can refer you to a state registered dietitian.

General Guidelines

The questions most frequently asked by colostomates are about wind, diarrhoea and constipation.

Wind

Beans, peas, onions, leeks, unripe banana and potato which is cooked then cooled (e.g. in potato salad and Shepherd's Pie) contain a type of sugar and starch that can escape digestion and enter the colon, where they are fermented to produce gas.

It may also help to avoid foods, which are high in fibre or contain unmilled grains and seeds. Beer and fizzy drinks may also increase the amount of wind.

Constipation

Eating more fibre containing foods can help to prevent constipation. Try to increase the amount of fibre by choosing:

Wholemeal (rather than white) bread or pasta, whole grain cereals e.g. Weetabix, porridge, more fruit and vegetables.

It is best to make these changes gradually to avoid problems with wind.

Fibre acts by absorbing water to make motions softer, so it is very important to drink plenty of fluids, at least six to eight cups a day.

Diarrhoea

Very spicy foods and large amounts of lager and beer can irritate the lining of the digestive system and cause frequent loose motions.

However, their effects can be reduced by eating spicy dishes in small quantities with plenty of rice, pasta or potatoes and never drinking on an empty stomach.

Pure fruit juices and some fruits and vegetables may cause diarrhoea in some people.

Often it's not what you eat!

The consistency of your stoma output doesn't only depend on the type of food you eat. Water is absorbed from undigested food as it passes along the colon. If a large section of the colon has been removed, then your stoma is likely to work more often and the output be fairly liquid, or of a toothpaste consistency. If most of the colon is still intact, then motions will be more formed and less frequent.

Don't assume that food is to blame for the way your stoma behaves. There may be some other reason.

Wind may be due to:

- eating in a hurry
- meals at irregular times
- going for long periods without food

Diarrhoea may be the result of:

- a stomach bug
- stress or an emotional upset
- antibiotics

Constipation may be due to:

- not drinking enough fluid
- not getting enough exercise
- some medicines e.g. certain painkillers or antidepressants (check with your doctor or pharmacist)

This leaflet has been put together with the help of the Stoma Care Department, St. Marks Hospital, Northwick Park, Watford Road, Harrow and volunteers with personal knowledge of this subject.

Our leaflet is intended as a general guide. You should seek medical advice, if you experience persistent alteration in your stoma functioning, or if you develop new digestive symptoms.

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