



Colostomy Fact Sheet

Colostomy: A surgically created opening in the abdominal wall through which digested food passes.

Temporary colostomy: May be required to give a portion of the bowel a chance to rest and heal. When healing has occurred, the colostomy can be reversed and normal bowel function restored.

Permanent colostomy: May be required when a disease affects the end part of the colon or rectum.

Reasons for surgery: Cancer, diverticulitis, imperforate anus, Hirschsprung's disease, trauma

Care of colostomy:

A pouching system is usually worn. Pouches are odor free and different manufacturers have disposable or reusable varieties to fit one's lifestyle. Ostomy supplies are available at drug stores, medical supply stores and through the mail.

Irrigation: Certain people are candidates for learning irrigation techniques that will allow for increased control over the timing of bowel movements.

Living with a colostomy:

Work: With the possible exception of jobs requiring very heavy lifting, a colostomy should not interfere with work. People with colostomies are successful business people, teachers, carpenters, etc.

Sex and social life: Physically, the creation of a colostomy usually does not affect sexual function. If there is a problem, it is almost always related to the removal of the rectum. The colostomy itself should not interfere with normal sexual activity or pregnancy. It does not prevent one from dating, marriage or having children.

Clothing: Usually one is able to wear the same clothing as before surgery including swimwear.

Sports and activities: With a securely attached pouch one can swim, camp out, play baseball and participate in practically all types of sports. Caution is advised in heavy body contact sports. Travel is not restricted in any way. Bathing and showering may be done with or without the pouch in place.

Diet: Usually there are no dietary restrictions and foods can be enjoyed as before.

Resources available:

Physicians and medical professionals are the first source of help. Specially trained nurses called Wound, Ostomy Continence Nurses (WOCN) are available for consultation in most major medical centers.

The United Ostomy Association (UOA) is a group comprised of many local chapters throughout the United States. These local groups hold meetings and provide support to prospective and existing ostomates. They sponsor education events and have qualified visitors to make personal or telephone visits. Contact the UOA for the chapter nearest you and for other educational publications.

Visit the UOA web site at www.uoa.org. It contains a great deal of information and many links to other sites, suppliers and resources.