

You and Your Stoma

What is a stoma?

Stoma is a Greek word meaning 'opening' or 'mouth.' There are generally three types of stomas:

- Colostomy: From the large bowel
- Ileostomy: From the small bowel
- Urostomy: A Urostomy is a type of urinary diversion

Why am I having a stoma?

Your operation may need to be performed for a variety of reasons and your Surgeon and Specialist Nurse will explain these to you. There are a number of different diseases and conditions that can result in the need for a stoma such as:

- Ulcerative Colitis
- Crohn's Disease
- Diverticular Disease
- Faecal incontinence
- Cancer
- Trauma
- Familial Adenomatous Polyposis
- Radiation damage
- Congenital abnormalities
- Bladder failure

Before your surgery

You will have the opportunity to meet with your Surgeon and Specialist Nurse on one or two occasions before your surgery, where you will be told about all the aspects of your surgery, given written information and most likely be shown products for you to consider. During your pre-operative appointments you should have time to ask questions and discuss any aspect of your care. You might want to start making a list of things to discuss prior to your appointments to take with you so that you do not forget to ask anything.

It is a good idea to take a member of your family or carer with you to your pre-operative appointments, as there is a lot of information to take in.

The stoma care nursing team will be key throughout your journey and will be available to advise and support both you and your family/carers.

What will my stoma look and feel like?

It will be soft to touch, pinkish-red in colour and moist; rather like the inside of your mouth. There is no sensation in the stoma so it is not painful. However, it has a rich blood supply and it is normal for it to bleed a little from time to time, especially when cleaning. Your stoma is likely to be swollen at first and will take a few weeks to reduce in size. There will be small stitches around the edge of your stoma which will either be dissolvable or your stoma care nurse will remove them in 1-2 weeks after your operation.

After your surgery

When you wake up after your operation, you will feel tired. It is possible that you may experience a range of emotions during this time and for some time afterwards. This will vary as we are all different.

You may have drips and drain tubes attached to your body, but there is no reason to be alarmed – this is quite normal. These will all be removed when appropriate and with very little discomfort.

Each stoma is different and it may take a while to start working. It will be best to discuss this with your stoma care nurse.

Caring for your skin

Caring for your skin is an essential part of looking after your stoma.

Immediately after your surgery, your stoma and surrounding skin may look swollen and even a little irritated. This is all to be expected post operatively and with good care it should improve in appearance over time.

You may find that your product requirements may alter due to the changes in your stoma size and shape. Your stoma template will alter and should be checked at least weekly for the first 8 weeks, or particularly if lots of healthy skin can be seen through the hole.

The area of skin around your stoma needs ongoing care and attention to prevent and reduce the risk of soreness. If you start to develop sore, irritated or even broken skin, do not delay in contacting your Stoma Care Nurse for appropriate advice on treatment and the need for alternative products.

Living with a stoma

When you are first discharged from hospital you will feel tired and find everyday tasks such as having a shower exhausting. This is normal and will improve over time. You may experience some pain and discomfort initially whilst recovering from your surgery. This is a normal part of recovery. Avoid tight fitting clothing during this period as your abdomen may be sore and swollen.

It is normal to feel emotional after major surgery, so don't worry if you have 'down' or 'teary' days to begin with. Talking to family and friends can be helpful – don't feel you need to cope alone. Your Stoma care Nurse is there to support you, and there are patient support groups who can help too.

Don't be frightened to ask for help.

Changing your stoma bag will be slow at first, but with practice and as you gain confidence, this will become part of your normal daily routine.

Obtaining your supplies

You will be discharged from hospital with a supply of bags and any additional equipment you may need. Your Stoma Care Nurse will have signed you up with an Ostomy Association in your state where you can obtain your monthly supplies. There will be a membership fee however this is something you will need to discuss with your Association.