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Going home

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The first three months

It is important for you to start getting back to your normal lifestyle as soon as possible after your surgery.

Convalescence after major abdominal surgery generally takes 8-12 weeks, though this will vary depending on your health and fitness before your operation and also on the type of surgery performed.

Adapting to life with a stoma

The way in which we view ourselves is known as our body image. It incorporates what we think our body looks like, what it can do and what it should be able to do. Most of us are self-critical of our body and following stoma surgery, this can intensify, giving rise to feelings of stress and anxiety. People who undergo stoma surgery have to adapt to a change in their body image and this can take some time. During the first few weeks and months of adapting to life with a stoma you may experience intense emotional feelings of hurt, anger and sadness.

These feelings are a natural response to dealing with the stress of your illness and surgery. Don't be afraid to open up and to acknowledge how you are feeling. Discuss your thoughts with your partner, family or close friends.

Remember that your stoma care nurse is also there to help and support you. Recognising these feelings and sharing them with others may help you in your recovery.

Activity levels

Have plenty of rest when you first go home, listen to your body and if you feel tired, sit down. Try to have an afternoon nap; you will get through the day much better. Don't be tempted to overdo things, because if you push yourself too hard your body will certainly let you know about it. Some household tasks can be done whilst you are sitting down.

Take advantage of offers of help from your family and friends in the early stage of your convalescence.

Nutrition

Your body's demand for calories and protein to repair body tissue following surgery is very high. Poor appetite can be a problem at first and you may find it easier to eat frequent smaller meals or regular snacks throughout the day. Gradually building up your appetite in this way over a period of weeks is much kinder to your digestive system in the early stages of

your convalescence. Dietary supplement drinks and high calorie sports drinks can also help to increase your calorie intake and give you more energy. However, before taking any food or drink supplements, talk to your GP or stoma care nurse.

Drink plenty of fluids especially water as this will help the healing process

by keeping your skin well hydrated. However, don't drink large amounts before meals as this will curb your appetite.

If you find that your appetite is not improving, or if you are struggling to gain weight after your stoma surgery, speak to your GP or stoma care nurse who may refer you to a dietitian for further advice.

Exercise

Take short walks to begin with. Don't tire yourself out by walking too far, remember that you have to walk home again. Walking with a friend or varying your route will make it more interesting.

If you go out walking on your own, be sure to let someone know where you are going and how long you intend to be out.

Always carry your mobile phone with you.

Specially designed abdominal exercises will strengthen your tummy muscles. However before starting any abdominal exercises you must first speak to your consultant surgeon, stoma care nurse or GP.



Driving

It is important for you to check with your consultant or GP before you start to drive again after your operation. You must also check your motor insurance policy, as conditions may vary depending on your insurer.

DO NOT drive until you have been given the authority to do so. Failure to comply with this advice may invalidate your motor insurance and could also be harmful to your recovery.

New anaesthetic drugs are making it possible for people to drive shortly after having a general anaesthetic.

However, your reaction to an emergency situation could be slower than normal and may cause you to injure yourself or other people.

Making an emergency stop can be painful and may damage unhealed abdominal muscles.

A close-up photograph of an elderly man with white hair and glasses, smiling warmly at the camera. He is wearing a light blue denim shirt over a green and white checkered vest. A yellow leather garden glove is visible on his hand, which is holding a bunch of white flowers. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor garden setting.

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Three months and beyond

You should now be feeling more confident and well enough to resume your normal lifestyle. This could mean returning to work, running your home and caring for your family or living out an active retirement.

Appearances are important to most of us. There are no restrictions on what you choose to wear. Making the effort to look good also makes us feel good.

Nutrition

You should now be enjoying varied meals and will probably have discovered which foods may cause an upset or 'windy' stoma and when to avoid eating them. You should aim to have a well balanced diet which includes fish, meat, dairy products, fruit, vegetables and plenty of fluids.

Exercise increases the body's demand for calories, so you should increase your intake of food and fluids both before and after exercising. It is best to eat at least an hour and a half before exercise and to wait for an hour after you have exercised before eating.



Lifting and posture



If you need to lift anything heavy, place your feet apart with one foot in front of the other, keep your back straight and bend your knees. Always keep the object you are lifting close to your body. Avoid carrying heavy loads and whenever possible, try to balance your load. Instead of carrying one heavy bag, divide your shopping between two bags and carry one in each hand.

Try not to stand for long periods. Remember to maintain an upright posture and do not slump or slouch.

What if you get pancaking?

What is pancaking?

Pancaking is the term used to describe what happens when the output from your colostomy does not fall to the bottom of the pouch, but instead remains at the top and around your stoma.

What can cause pancaking?

- *Insufficient air in the stoma pouch causing the sides of the pouch to stick together*
- *Sticky or stodgy output from your stoma*

Hints and tips

- *Drink plenty of fluids, especially water, unless you have been advised by your doctor to restrict how much you drink*
- *A laxative or a stool stiffener to alter the consistency of your stool may be advised*
- *Cover the pouch filter with one of the adhesive tabs supplied with your box of pouches. This will prevent the air escaping too quickly from your pouch*
- *Put a small crumpled tissue inside the pouch to prevent the sides sticking together*
- *Small foam squares available on prescription, can be stuck on the inside of your stoma pouch to prevent the sides from sticking together*
- *Before removing the backing paper from the pouch adhesive, lubricate the inside of your pouch with OstoZYME odour neutralising pouch lubricant*
- *Stoma irrigation or flushing the bowel out with warm water is a form of stoma management suitable to some but not all people with a colostomy. Irrigation can help reduce the problems associated with pancaking*

Pancaking can be a difficult problem to solve. Sometimes waste can escape under the pouch adhesive causing odour, leakage and sore skin.



Return to work programme

Speak to your employer about staggered working hours or going back to work on a part time basis for a while. Most employers will try to help you, if at all possible.

Going back to work

Depending on the type of operation you have had and whether or not you need to have any further treatment, you will probably be fit to return to work between 6 and 12 weeks after surgery.

Having a stoma should not restrict the type of work you do.

Before returning to work, you might want to talk to your employer about the possibility of a 'return to work programme'. This could include staggered hours or going back to work on a part time basis for a while. Most employers will try to help you, if at all possible.

No one at work needs to know about your stoma; 'to tell or not to tell' is your personal choice. However, being open and honest is often the best policy as trying to hide something can be very stressful. Your colleagues will be aware of your operation and may be curious about what has happened to you. There is no need for you to feel embarrassed, just plan beforehand who you are going to tell and how much you want them to know.

Keep a supply of your stoma care equipment at work.

Try to eat regularly during the working day. Remember to take extra fluids to drink

during the course of the day. This is particularly important during hot or humid weather.

If your job involves lifting heavy objects consider wearing a support belt. This may help to prevent a hernia from developing around your stoma.

If your work is of a physical nature, you can protect your stoma with a specially designed plastic shield.

Disposal of used stoma pouches

Empty your pouch down the lavatory and if possible, rinse it before disposal. Your stoma pouch and any other used items, wipes etc must be placed inside a plastic bag, sealed and put into the dustbin.

Do not flush any of your stoma equipment down the lavatory as it will cause a blockage.

Pouches with a flushable liner are available if you have a colostomy, however they cannot be used if you have an ileostomy or a urostomy. Your stoma care nurse can advise you on whether or not they are suitable for you.

Holidays

Holidays are good for us and you can be confident of being able to enjoy one as soon as you feel ready to do so. Don't be tempted to travel too far too soon. Give your body time to recover and give yourself time to find out the effect of different foods on your shortened digestive system before you go globe trotting.

Comfort and a bit of luxury not too far from home will boost your confidence to go further afield next time.



Travelling

Having a stoma should not prevent you from travelling, either for business or pleasure. Whenever you leave the house, always make sure you have a small supply of all the items you need for changing your pouch.

Your basic travel pack should include:

- One or two prepared pouches or flanges and pouches if using a two piece system.

- Deodorising spray (travel size) if used.

- Adhesive remover wipes (sachet) if used.

- Dry cleaning wipes

- Plastic disposal bag.

Choose a travel bag that best suits your needs and remember to check and refresh the contents periodically.

Visit respond.co.uk or telephone 0800 220 300 to speak to one of our experienced customer advisors.

Travelling by road

- The RADAR National Key Scheme offers access to 9,000 accessible locked toilets around the country. As a Respond home delivery service customer, we will supply you with a key to unlock all disabled toilets in the UK.

- Don't leave your stoma supplies in the car during warm weather. The adhesive on pouches and flanges can start to melt or distort in warm or humid conditions.

Travelling by rail

- All cross country main line rail services have on-board lavatories, but some local services do not. Check this before you travel.

Travelling by air

- Carry your travel pack in your hand luggage.

- Scissors cannot be carried in hand luggage so remember to cut out and prepare pouches or flanges which may be needed during your flight.

- Book an aisle seat close to a lavatory.

- Don't miss meals before or during flights and avoid fizzy drinks, either of which may give you wind.

- Go easy on alcohol or avoid it altogether. Alcohol can cause dehydration which in turn can make you more susceptible to Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT).

Travelling by sea

- Lavatories are usually good and plentiful on ferries, however when the sea is rough they get very busy.

- Department store and supermarket toilet facilities are regularly checked for cleanliness and hygiene purposes. You may prefer to use these facilities rather than public lavatories. In an emergency an 'urgent use of toilet' card (available from Respond) can be utilised in any shop or venue.



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Exercise following abdominal surgery and stoma formation

Your abdominal muscles may have become weakened as the result of the operation you have had. This can cause backache, a dragging sensation in the lower part of your abdomen and poor posture.

Whilst you were in hospital, the physiotherapist probably taught you some simple exercises to help to strengthen these muscles and improve your posture.

If you can't remember the exercises or weren't given any, don't worry, it's never too late to start. Always check with your consultant or GP before starting any exercise routine.

DO NOT
exercise if you are feeling unwell or very tired. The following simple exercises have been devised for you by the physiotherapy department at The Queens Medical Centre Nottingham, were endorsed in 2013 by Chartered Physiotherapists Promoting Continence (CPPC). They are simple to do and should help to tone and strengthen your tummy muscles.

Try to exercise daily and repeat each exercise ten times. If you can't manage ten repetitions at first don't worry; just do as many as you can and increase repetitions as you become stronger.

These exercises should be comfortable to do. If you feel any pain or discomfort whilst doing them, STOP and consult your GP or physiotherapist before recommencing them.

Pelvic tilting



Lie on your back on a firm surface (a bed with a good mattress will be fine) with your knees bent and feet flat on the bed. Pull your lower tummy and your bottom upwards slightly whilst pressing the middle of your back into the bed. Try to breath out as you are doing this and hold the position for two seconds. Let go slowly.

Knee rolling



Lie on your back on a firm surface (a bed with a good mattress will be fine) with your knees bent and feet flat on the bed. Pull your tummy muscles in. Keeping your knees together, slowly roll them from side to side. A little way at first, then gradually increasing as far as is comfortable.

Head raising



Lie on your back on a firm surface (a bed with a good mattress will be fine) with knees bent up and head on a pillow. Place your hands on the front of your thighs and pull your tummy in. Lift your head off the pillow and hold for three seconds, then slowly return to the starting position.

Hip hitching



Lie flat on your back with your head on a pillow. Bend one knee up and keep the other straight. Pull your tummy in. With the leg that is straight, draw up at the hip towards your armpit. Then stretch the leg down as far as you can. Do the same with the other leg.

Lift and twist



Lie on your back on a firm surface (a bed with a good mattress will be fine), with knees bent up and head on a pillow. Place both hands on the front of your right thigh. Lift your left shoulder and head towards the outside right knee. Hold for three seconds then slowly return to the starting position. Do the same on the opposite side.

This booklet has been produced in conjunction
with the Community Specialist Nurse team at
Respond Healthcare



For more information, help or advice call  0800 220 300

What if you get ballooning?

Introduction

This booklet has been produced in conjunction with the Community Specialist Nurse Team at Respond , 2016.

What is ballooning?

Ballooning happens when the wind from your stoma collects inside your pouch causing it to inflate or balloon.

What can cause ballooning?

- *A blocked pouch filter*
- *A wet pouch filter*
- *Dietary issues*

Hints and tips

- *Ballooning is uncomfortable. It causes your pouch to bulge underneath your clothing, and can lead to leakage and odour. This wind needs to be released. If you are using a 1-piece closed pouch, you will need to change your pouch. If you are using a drainable pouch it will need emptying*
- *Different pouch manufacturers use different filters. Try different pouches until you find the filter that best suits your needs*
- *If you are using a 2-piece system, you can lift a section of the pouch away from the flange to release the wind, then stick or clip the two back together again*
- *If you usually wear a 1-piece pouch and ballooning is a constant problem, you may wish to consider using a 2-piece system*

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Useful Contacts

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IA (The Ileostomy and Internal Pouch Support Group)

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