



Living with a Stoma: Sports & Fitness



Ostomy Care
Healthy skin. Positive outcomes.



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A glossary is included at the back of this booklet to help with terms you may not be familiar with.

As your body begins to heal following surgery, you may wonder about a more active lifestyle — either to resume the sports and fitness activities you have already enjoyed, or whether you'll be able to take up a new sport that you want to try.

The thought of taking up a new sport or striving for ambitious goals in a sport previously enjoyed, can seem overwhelming, but many have done just that. In fact, they believe they are fitter and healthier than before their operations. We created this booklet to help answer your questions and encourage you to get the many pleasures and benefits that come from physical activity.



Sports and fitness

For many people, stoma surgery creates a renewed zest for life. Along with that new found enthusiasm comes the desire and determination to achieve goals they would never before have considered.

Stoma surgery is a major event that should not be underestimated. The first few weeks or even months following the operation may be difficult as you adjust gradually to having a stoma. However, once fully recovered and settled at home, returning to the lifestyle you enjoyed before the operation should be attainable.

As long as you have no complications and your healthcare professional has no objection, you can enjoy almost any kind of sporting activity. Contact sports, such as rugby or football, can be possible. Even sports that call for a lot of bending, such as bowling and aerobics, have been taken up after having stoma surgery.

Your body's response and capabilities

Before looking at specific sports and fitness activities, it is important to have a clear understanding of how your body has responded to your surgery.

The stoma, stronger than you think

The stoma on your abdomen may look vulnerable, but in fact it is quite resilient. The surgical incision should be fully closed just about ten days after the operation, and over time, the scar tissue surrounding the stoma will reach its optimum strength.

Hernia prevention and care

Every person, with or without a stoma, should take care to protect his or her abdomen. Now that you have a stoma, you will want to be especially mindful of this area of your body.

With a stoma, the risk of developing a hernia from lifting or strenuous exercise may be higher than that of developing a common hernia. This is because the muscles supporting the stoma are not as strong as they were before surgery.

You can help prevent the development of a stomal hernia by taking precautions. Keep your weight in check and talk with your surgeon and/or stoma care nurse before resuming any abdominal exercises.

Contact your healthcare professional for further information or if you have questions.

Perineal wound healing

In some cases, a person may have a perineal (rectal) wound resulting from the removal of the anus and rectum. Although this area is likely to be tender for longer than an abdominal incision, it should heal and become equally resilient.

Staying hydrated

If you have a stoma, particularly an ileostomy, there are occasions where you may become dehydrated. Take care to drink plenty of water unless you have a fluid restriction.

There are several situations that make you especially susceptible to dehydration. For example in hot climates and/or when exercising, less urine could be produced, making it more concentrated. Also when when diarrhoea strikes, more fluid is being lost, so more should be taken in.

To help rehydrate your body, water is the best fluid, as it is the most readily available. You can also get isotonic sports drinks and rehydrating solutions from most pharmacies, which may also be used for cases of diarrhoea. Please contact your stoma care nurse for advice.



One good sign of being well hydrated is passing clear or straw-coloured urine throughout the day.

Diet for fitness

Once you recover from surgery, your diet and state of nutrition should be getting back to normal. How and what we eat is as much part of our individuality and lifestyle as our appearance and personality, and having a stoma should not have many restrictions to individual preferences.

It is vital to re-establish a healthy diet, but be cautious at first and chew thoroughly to avoid possible digestive problems. You may find that some foods upset your system, causing gas, diarrhoea or even discomfort. Please contact your stoma care nurse for advice.

Pay attention to your body to learn how your digestive system works best — when you are hungry, how long it takes to digest and what foods upset your system, if any.

Keep an eye on your weight. A nourishing diet includes fruit and vegetables, meat, fish, dairy products and cereal and will help keep you healthy. Additional vitamin supplements also may help to ensure you are getting the best nutrition, speak to your stoma care nurse or health care professional for advice.

Fitness results from the best possible balance between diet and exercise.

Most foods contain energy in the form of calories. The number of calories we need in a day depends on two factors that will be different for everyone — the level of physical activity and metabolic rate. Both of these factors affect the amount of calories you should take in. Everyone has a different metabolic rate, so some people will gain or lose weight when consuming the same amount of calories. Early in your healing stages, you may require more calories in the form of proteins for good cell and muscle repair. A dietician may offer helpful recommendations as well.



Beginning to exercise again

As you recover from surgery, you will probably feel tired and may have little wish for exercise.

But you know it is important for your overall health and well-being to start moving around, even just a little at a time. Exercise may help you get better faster and also prevent potential complications from sitting or lying down. This does not mean aggressive or strenuous exercises by any means. Take it easy, start out slowly and enjoy the thought that you are getting back to your normal lifestyle and level of exercise.

Walking

The easiest and most effective form of exercise can be walking. It gets the blood flowing, helps with mental alertness, helps lift your spirits and generally increases your physical well-being.

Walking can be started soon after surgery and gradually increased to a brisk pace, adding minutes and distance over time.

You can even walk in the house. Online videos and DVDs, or even just some invigorating music, will help set the pace. Some people practice going up and down stairs to increase stamina and endurance. But if weather permits, a walk outside in the fresh air can do wonders both physically and mentally.

Cycling

Riding a bike is also an excellent form of exercise that does not put too much strain on your abdomen or involve heavy impact. Like walking, biking can be introduced gradually and then increased over time to higher levels.

If you have a perineal wound, you may want try other activities for a while. This area can take a while to heal, and sitting on a bike seat may cause discomfort. Try walking instead until the wound has fully healed.

Other favorite activities

You might enjoy aerobic activities such as skating, golfing, jogging or tennis. Training with light weights and frequent repetitions can be beneficial as well.

It is always wise to pay attention to how your body responds. You know it better than anyone else. If an activity makes you breathless or causes you discomfort anywhere, it might be wise to try another form of exercise, or take a break and return to it later if you feel you are up to it.

TIP

There is no motivation better than knowing a friend is waiting to join you in a walk around the block or a round of golf. Gentle exercise can benefit your social life as well as your body.



Swimming, an easy and gentle way to exercise

Swimming is a popular and beneficial form of exercise. It can be enjoyed by everyone, regardless of ability. Many people who are recovering from surgery are encouraged to take up swimming as an easy and gentle exercise.

Swimming is not only one of the best forms of exercise for every part of the body, but it can also be taken up gradually and gently to build up stamina at a steady pace. It can be a highly sociable pastime, frequently enjoyed as a family outing. There is no reason why a person with a stoma cannot join in the fun.

Overcoming embarrassment

Swimming can help in another way — to overcome psychological hurdles. Do not fear being in changing rooms, pools, or in and around the water. The courage to take up this challenge will be rewarded by newly gained confidence, not only to enjoy more social sports but also activities such as shopping and sunbathing.

People with a stoma may expect others will stare at their stoma. In truth, most people will not even notice the colour of your swimsuit, let alone what is underneath.

“A few years ago, when I was at the beach, I even wore a bikini and the fact that I have a colostomy went entirely unnoticed.”

— BETTY S.

TIP

Before going to a public swimming area, try your swimsuit at home. Wear it in the bath or shower to see how you look when it is wet and clinging to your body.

Pouch security

Another concern is that the pouch may come loose in the water. This is unlikely and easy to prove to yourself. Just sit in bath water for a while to test and ensure that the seal stays snug and leak-free. The chance of the pouch showing or coming off, even one that is two-piece, is quite unlikely. If you are embarrassed changing in front of other people, try wearing a long shirt to cover most of your body. Even just draping a towel over your shoulder will keep your stoma from view. Or you can change at home and wear clothes over your swimsuit.

There are suppliers who make swimsuits to fit particular needs, such as high-waisted swim trunks or swim bottoms. You may want to check with local suppliers in your area.

TIP

You might think the impact from diving will pull on the stoma and the pouch. For added security, a snug bathing suit or drawstring trunks/shorts may help keep it in place.

Contact and team sports

If you prefer the action of a team or contact sport, do not let minor concerns keep you from returning to it. Having a stoma will mean planning ahead, but you can still continue to participate.

You may be concerned about your stoma, wondering whether it can be damaged.

Remember that it may take several weeks or months for the stoma to shrink to its permanent size. Damage to your stoma is unlikely, but you should still take precautions to protect it.

Another concern is that the pouch could be punctured or ripped off during contact sports. To avoid a damaged pouch, precautions can be taken.

For added security, many people use firmly-fitted waistbands or girdles to keep the pouch securely in place. Everyone has individual needs and preferences, so it is up to you to see what suits you best. Try different sporting outfits, such as running tights or spandex shorts, to see what works best for you.

Competitive sports call for both skill and fitness. So it is essential to build up to the proper level of fitness gradually, before returning to or taking up a strenuous sport after the operation.

TIP

Empty your pouch before activities. If you have a colostomy and you wish to minimise the “flow” from the stoma, stick to a low-fibre diet. Be sure to watch out for dehydration. Drink plenty of fluids before and after activities.



Reaching new goals

People with a stoma often feel determined to become healthier than they were before the operation. This can lead to ambitious goals they might not have set before their surgery.

On the other hand, many athletes who were superachievers before their illness fear that they may not be able to continue with their sport once they have a stoma.

In any endurance sport, the body needs to be in peak condition regardless of whether or not you have a stoma.

TIP

If a lot of running is involved, rubbing or chafing around the stoma may occur. Little red marks similar to mouth ulcers might appear on the stoma. They should heal quickly and disappear with rest. Double-check that the pouching system is not too tight or cuts into the stoma. If the pouch fits properly and is not too long, it should not touch or rub against the skin. If the red marks don't resolve, contact your stoma nurse.



Take it easy to start, and gradually build up your strength and fitness before setting more ambitious goals. Your surgery means that initially you will be less fit than you were before.

“When I first learned I had to undergo a urostomy operation, my first reaction was — will I still be able to ride? If the answer had been no, I’m not sure I would have gone ahead with it. I live for sport and within 3 months of my operation I was back on my horse.”

— JULIE P.

Dehydration can be a major concern for athletes, whether they have stomas or not. Drink plenty of fluids at every opportunity to avoid problems with your stoma.

TIP

If you would like to talk to someone about a particular sport, contact the National associations. They may be able to put you in touch with someone who currently enjoys your sport and who can give you some practical advice.

Resources and Organisations

Your healthcare professional and your stoma care nurse will be very important resources for you in the days ahead. You also have ongoing access to online information, or printed educational materials, at www.hollister.co.uk/en-gb/ostomycare/educationaltools such as:

- **The “Understanding Your Stoma” Booklet Series**
Provides information on lifestyle-related topics such as diet, travel, sports, and fitness
- **“Caring for Your Loved One with a Stoma” Booklet**
Provides information and support for your loved one(s), in helping you live life to the fullest after stoma surgery
- **“Routine Care of Your Stoma” Care Tip**
Provides information on how to care for a stoma
- **“Stoma Educational Theatre” Video Modules**
Provides an overview of stoma products, helping you to choose the products that are right for you and learn how to use them
- **“Living with a Stoma” Video Modules**
Provides insights from other people who have been through stoma surgery on how to lead full and productive lives

Stoma support groups are also available to individuals who have had stoma surgery. Here, you are able to interact with people who are facing many of the same challenges that you are. The ability to discuss issues with someone who understands what you are experiencing can be very beneficial.

Urostomy Association



Tel: 01386 430140

Email: info@urostomyassociation.org.uk

Web: www.urostomyassociation.org.uk

Colostomy UK



Admin line: 0118 939 1537

24 hour Helpline: 0800 328 4257

(Practical and emotional support)

Email: info@ColostomyUk.org

Web: www.colostomyuk.org

Ileostomy Association



Freephone: 0800 018 4724

Email: info@iasupport.org

Web: www.iasupport.org

Ileostomy & Internal Pouch
Association

Glossary

Anus

The opening at the end of the digestive tract through which stool passes.

Colon

Another term for the large intestine or last portion of the gastrointestinal tract.

Colostomy

A stoma (surgical opening) created in the colon; part of the large intestine.

Dehydration

The loss of too much water from the body.

Diarrhoea

Loose watery output from the stoma that is more so than usual.

Hernia

A weakening of the support muscles around the stoma that creates a bulge.

Ileostomy

A stoma (surgical opening) created in the Ileum part of the small intestine.

Perineal

The area between the anus and the genital area.

Peristomal Skin

The area around the stoma starting at the skin/stoma junction and extending outward to the area covered by the pouching system.

Pouch

The bag that collects output from the stoma.

Rectum

The last portion of the digestive tract before the anus. Stores stool in place prior to a bowel movement

Skin Barrier

The portion of your pouching system that fits immediately around your stoma. It protects your skin and holds the pouching system in place.

Stoma

A surgically created opening in the gastrointestinal or urinary tract. Also known as an ostomy.

Stool

Waste material from the bowel. Also known as a bowel movement.

Urostomy

A stoma (surgical opening) created to divert urine.

Wear time

The length of time a pouching system can be worn. Wear times can vary but should be fairly consistent for each person.

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