



# Caring for Colostomates

A practical guide for  
staff in Nursing and  
Residential Homes and  
those who care for a  
colostomate at home

Freephone helpline:  
**0800 328 4257**

colostomy  association

[www.colostomyassociation.org.uk](http://www.colostomyassociation.org.uk)

# Caring for Colostomates

## **Patient Profile:** An at a glance reference guide for Carers and Colostomates

Name: (Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms) \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

NHS No: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone No: \_\_\_\_\_

Hospital/Outpatients attended: \_\_\_\_\_

### **About the Stoma:**

Stoma Type: (Colostomy/Ileostomy/Urostomy) \_\_\_\_\_

Stoma Size: \_\_\_\_\_ (mm)    Template: Yes/No \_\_\_\_\_

### **Appliances used:**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_    Name of Appliance \_\_\_\_\_    Item Code: \_\_\_\_\_    Manufacturer's Name & Tel No: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Supplier/Delivery Company:**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_    Name of Supplier \_\_\_\_\_    Tel No: \_\_\_\_\_    Order Ref: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Main Contacts:**

Colostomy Association:    Helpline: 0800 3284257    Contact Tel No: 0118 939 1537

Stoma Nurse: \_\_\_\_\_    Contact Tel No: \_\_\_\_\_

GP/Practice: \_\_\_\_\_    Contact Tel No: \_\_\_\_\_

Consultant/Surgeon: \_\_\_\_\_    Contact Tel No: \_\_\_\_\_

Pharmacist: \_\_\_\_\_    Contact Tel No: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Medical Helplines:**

NHS Direct (England):    [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)    Contact Tel No: 0845 4647

NHS Direct (Scotland):    [www.nhs24.com](http://www.nhs24.com)    Contact Tel No: 08454 24 24 24

NHS Direct (Wales):    [www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk)    Contact Tel No: 0845 4647

## Stoma Appliances

All colostomates should have a list (from hospital), or a repeat prescription form, detailing the appliances that they use. It is worth recording this information, including the name and contact details of the manufacturer, on the Patient Profile opposite. This is because there are many manufacturers and very many different types of appliance available.

### Different types of appliances

- One-piece where the adhesive flange is attached to the bag and after use the complete appliance is removed and replaced with a new one.
- Two-piece which consist of an adhesive base-plate which is fitted accurately round the stoma and a bag which either sticks or clips onto it. The bags can be quickly changed without removing the base-plate to avoid disturbing the skin.
- Closed bags which are mainly used for coping with formed motions. They are usually changed about twice a day. Closed bags with a special liner which contains the motions and can be flushed down the toilet are available.
- Drainable bags which are mainly used for coping with liquid motions. They may be worn for two or three days as they can be emptied through an outlet at the bottom and then resealed with an integral Velcro seal or a clip. Emptying is easier if the inside of the bag is lubricated with a few drops of baby oil before putting it on.

## Obtaining Supplies

Stoma appliances are obtained on prescription. Everyone with a permanent stoma living in the UK, whatever their age, is entitled to free prescriptions. However, those under 60 will need to apply for a Medical Exemption Certificate. To do this complete form FP92A (obtainable from the hospital or surgery) and tick permanent fistula as the qualifying condition. People with temporary stomas are not entitled to free prescriptions and may find it cheaper to pay for a pre-payment certificate.

The prescription can either be taken to the chemist or sent to a specialist supplier who will deliver the appliances. There are many suppliers so it is worth recording the name and contact details of the supplier on the Patient Profile opposite. The stoma care nurse will usually provide details of a supplier but a list of all manufacturers and suppliers and their contact details is available from CA head office or to download from the CA Website.

Re-order further supplies when starting on the last box. Supplies should not be hoarded but bear in mind that deliveries may take longer around bank holidays when suppliers may be closed. The local stoma care nurse or colorectal/surgical ward may be able to provide a few appliances in an emergency.

Suppliers provide free wipes for cleaning around the stoma and free plastic bags for disposing of the used appliance.

Appliances are made with a range of pre-cut holes in the adhesive flange/base-plate. If the stoma is of an irregular size or shape, some suppliers will cut the flange/base-plate to the correct shape if a template is supplied.

# Caring for Colostomates

## Changing the Appliance

An appliance is best changed when about half full. This makes the process easier and the colostomate more comfortable. It is usually carried out in the bathroom, but if the colostomate is seated, this can mean folds or creases form around the stoma making it difficult to achieve a good seal between the skin and the flange/base-plate. It may be best to remove the used appliance and attach the new one when the colostomate is standing. However, if this is not possible then an alternative might be for the colostomate to lay flat on a bed.

### 1. Before you begin

Check whether the hole in the adhesive flange/base-plate has been pre-cut to the size and shape of the stoma. If not, use a template to mark the outline of the stoma and, using curved scissors, trim to the correct shape (see Fig 1). If the hole is too large skin will show and be irritated by the contents of the bag, which can make it sore (See Fig. 2). If the hole is too small, it may rub against the stoma and cause it to swell.

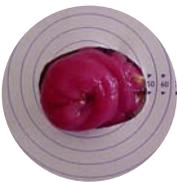


Fig.1 Correct



Fig.2 Incorrect

### Make sure you have what you need:

- Disposal bag
- Adhesive remover: Spray or wipes
- Warm water and a towel
- Protective film: Spray or wipes (if required)
- New appliance
- Scissors (if required)

### 2. Removing the old appliance

Using adhesive remover will help to prevent any damage to the skin. Check the skin around the stoma for any early signs of irritation. Gently clean the stoma and surrounding skin with warm water. Do not use soaps or baby wipes as these often contain perfume or moisturisers and may affect how the flange/base-plate sticks, or may irritate the skin.

### 3. Fitting the new appliance

Gently pat the skin until it is completely dry. It is important to protect the skin so a protective film is usually wiped or sprayed onto the skin around the stoma. Allow time for the film to dry before fitting the new appliance. Press the flange/base-plate in place for at least half a minute to make sure the seal is secure. (If using a two-piece appliance, then attach the bag to the base-plate.)

## Disposal of Used Appliances

Seal the used appliance inside a disposal bag (provided free by suppliers). In a nursing home this can be disposed of with other clinical waste.

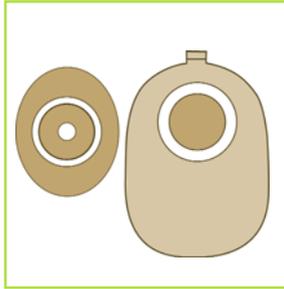
A domestic clinical waste collection service is available in some areas. Contact the environmental department of the local council for more details. If this service is not available in your area, the used appliance may be wrapped up well and put in the dustbin. Some people prefer to empty the contents of the stoma bag into the toilet before discarding it in this way.

Appliances with liners that contain the motions and can be flushed down the toilet are now available.

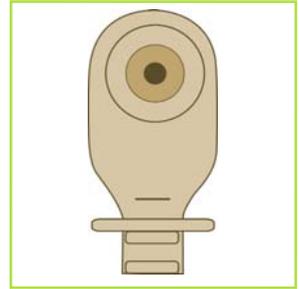
## Different types of stoma appliances



One-piece closed

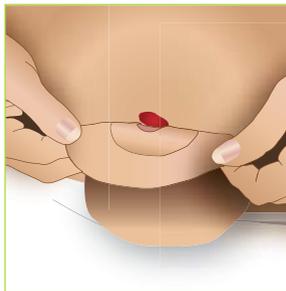
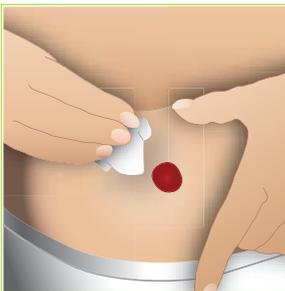


Two-piece closed



One-piece drainable

## Changing a stoma appliance



## Day to Day Life with a Colostomy

### Eating

It is not necessary for people with a colostomy to follow a special diet unless they have been advised to do so by their doctor for another specific medical reason. Some people may find that certain foods cause problems i.e. too much fibre may cause loose motions or beans may cause excessive wind. However, this varies from person to person and many colostomates find they can eat anything. If a food is suspected of causing problems it is advisable to try it again at intervals, separated by at least a week, before eliminating it altogether.

A leaflet, *Healthy Eating: guidelines for people with a colostomy*, is available from CA Head Office or to download from the CA Website.

### Bathing and showering

The bag can be left in place or taken off while in the bath or shower. Water cannot get into the bag or the stoma. If bathing or showering without a bag, choose a time when the stoma is less active i.e. before rather than after a meal.

## Common Concerns

### 1. About the Stoma

#### Sore Skin

If the skin around the stoma becomes red and inflamed this can be due to damage when removing the flange/base-plate. Using an adhesive remover may help to prevent this. With a two-piece or drainable appliance the flange/base-plate remains in place for several days which reduces skin damage.

Sore skin can also result from contact between the contents of the bag and the skin. Stomas can change in size and shape so check the size of the stoma every few months to make sure the hole in the flange/base-plate fits snugly around the stoma (See Fig. 1), so that the skin is not exposed.

If the problem continues, consult a stoma care nurse who can advise on special products which can heal the skin and do not interfere with the adhesion of the appliance.

#### Bleeding

The stoma bleeds easily if it is rubbed a bit too hard. If the bleeding does not stop, or the blood is coming from inside the stoma, consult a stoma care nurse. The stoma may bleed more easily if anticoagulant drugs e.g. Warfarin, or aspirin, are being taken.

#### Parastomal Hernia

This is a swelling or bulge around the stoma which can cause problems with securing the flange/base-plate. Special appliances and accessories to overcome this problem are available. Girdles and belts to support the hernia and make the colostomate more comfortable can be obtained on prescription. Consult a stoma care nurse for advice.

A leaflet about parastomal hernias is available from CA Head Office or to download from the CA Website.

### 2. About the appliance

#### Leakage

A stoma appliance may leak occasionally. However, if this occurs regularly consult a stoma care nurse who will be able to suggest a different appliance or accessories e.g. barrier rings, paste to fill in creases or crevices in the skin, or flange extenders.

#### Ballooning

This occurs when gas, expelled through the stoma, collects inside the bag causing it to inflate. Most bags have a filter which allows this gas to escape. Occasionally the filter will become blocked and the bag will need to be changed. If this is happening on a regular basis it may be worth trying a different bag which may have a more effective filter. To ensure the filter doesn't get wet and become ineffective, when in the bath or shower, cover it with the sticky patch supplied in the box of stoma appliances.

#### Pancaking

This occurs when, instead of dropping to the bottom of the bag, the motion collects around the stoma and may seep between the flange and the skin. One of the reasons this happens is because there isn't enough air in the bag and the two sides stick together. It may help to cover the filter with a sticky patch to prevent gas escaping from the bag or place a small piece of crumpled tissue inside the bag to keep the sides apart. Lubricating the inside of the bag with baby oil or a special gel may help the motion to drop to the bottom of the bag.

### 3. Other concerns

#### Loose Motions

If a large section of the colon has been removed it is likely that motions will always be fairly liquid and it may be easier to use a drainable bag. If motions are normally formed an episode of diarrhoea could be due to a "stomach bug", stress or emotional upset or certain medication e.g. antibiotics. If diarrhoea persists it is important to seek medical advice.

#### Constipation

Eating more fibre and fruit should help to make motions softer. Constipation can also be the result of not drinking enough fluid or the side effect of medication e.g. certain painkillers or antidepressants (check with your doctor or pharmacist). Do not use suppositories or enemas as the stoma will reject them. If the stoma has not worked for several days or there is pain or vomiting seek medical advice.

#### Odour

There will only be an odour when emptying or changing the bag. This can be reduced by spraying a deodorant or striking a match. Odour while the bag is in place could indicate a leakage or a faulty filter. Drops, gels, capsules and sachets are available to neutralize any odour inside the bag.

#### Rectal discharge

It is normal for colostomates who still have their rectum in place to pass clear or putty-coloured mucus out through the anus. This is because the lining of the bowel produces mucus as a lubricant to assist the passage of food and waste. Even though motions now pass out through the colostomy, the rectum will continue to produce mucus but the amount may decrease with time.

A leaflet giving more information about rectal discharge is available from CA Head Office or to download from the CA Website.

#### Rectal discomfort

After an operation to form a colostomy some people still experience the sensation of rectal fullness and feel as if they need to pass a motion in the normal way. Sitting on the toilet may provide some relief.

A leaflet giving more information about rectal pain and discomfort is available from CA Head Office or to download from the CA Website.

### Sources of Support for Carers

#### Carers UK

Information on benefits, rights and services available to carers.

Tel: 0808 808 7777

Web: [www.carersuk.org](http://www.carersuk.org)

#### Crossroads

Provide support for carers and the people they care for.

Tel: 0845 450 0350

Web: [www.crossroads.org.uk](http://www.crossroads.org.uk)

Enquire at the local GP surgery if they run a Carer's Support Group.



## How to contact us...

colostomy  association

**Write to:**  
Enterprise House, 95 London Street,  
Reading RG1 4QA

**General Enquiries:**  
Tel: 0118 939 1537

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