



Healthy Eating for People with an Ileostomy

After formation of your ileostomy you will continue to digest and absorb all nutrients normally in your small bowel.

Resection of your large bowel results in you absorbing less water and salt, so you will initially experience quite a liquid output from your ileostomy. However, with time your body will adapt to absorb more water and salt so your ileostomy output will become thicker. You can maintain good health by taking a varied diet with an adequate amount of fluid and salt.

This leaflet contains:

- Information about the reintroduction of food for those with a new ileostomy
- Guidelines to help you choose a healthy diet
- Guidance about diet in relation to developing acceptable ileostomy function

Whilst the experience of others may serve as a guide, remember that as an individual you may respond differently to food, both before and after surgery, and therefore you should base food choices on your own personal tolerance.

Please note that the advice in this booklet is not suitable for those with short bowel or intestinal failure. If you are unsure, please consult your doctor, stoma care nurse or dietitian.

Reintroduction of food after formation of a new ileostomy

After surgery it is important to take a well-balanced diet to help with healing. As with any operation, you may find that it takes time for your appetite to return, especially if you were unwell before surgery. It is a good idea to reintroduce food gradually, starting with a soft, nutritious diet which is easy to digest:

- Include protein foods such as meat, fish, eggs, cheese and milk to help wound healing.
- Eat carbohydrates such as white bread, low fibre cereals like rice krispies or cornflakes, potatoes (no skins) and white rice/pasta for energy.
- If your appetite is poor, take smaller meals with snacks in-between, such as cereal, sandwiches, cheese and crackers, yoghurts or nutritious drinks like milk or other supplements which may be recommended by your dietitian.
- Choose plainly cooked foods and avoid spicy or highly seasoned dishes, fried foods and fibrous foods.
- Eat slowly and chew your food well.

Fibrous foods which should be avoided

Fibrous foods are difficult to digest and may cause blockage if they are eaten in large quantities or are not properly chewed, so for the first six to eight weeks after your operation you should avoid:

- Nuts
- Pith
- Raw vegetables
- Mushrooms
- Coconut
- Seeds
- Fruit or vegetable skins
- Salad
- Celery
- Pineapple
- Pips
- Peas
- Sweetcorn
- Dried fruit
- Mango

Once your ileostomy has settled (approximately six to eight weeks) you may reintroduce fibrous foods in small quantities, ensuring that they are all well chewed.

Fluids and Salt

It takes time for your ileostomy to adapt and you may experience a loose, liquid output for several weeks. During this time you may be losing more fluid and salt than is normal and therefore be at risk of becoming dehydrated. To prevent this you should ensure that you have an adequate fluid and salt intake:

- Aim for at least 8-10 cups of fluid per day (1.5-2 litres) including water, tea, coffee and squashes.
- Add extra salt to your meals. Half to one teaspoon of salt spread evenly throughout the day should be adequate.
- If your output is high or you become dehydrated, your doctor may prescribe an oral rehydration solution for you, e.g. St Mark's Electrolyte Mix. Please ask your doctor, stoma nurse or dietitian for further advice.

As your ileostomy settles your output will become thicker but you should continue to ensure you have an adequate fluid and salt intake.

Healthy eating for people with an established ileostomy

Once your ileostomy begins to adapt and you become used to its normal function, you will feel more confident to experiment with food, and many people find they can enjoy the freedom of a full and varied diet.

Choosing a healthy diet

No one food contains all the nutrients needed for health so you should choose a variety of foods from each of the following groups to achieve an adequate intake (this may be modified by your dietitian if you are under or over weight).

Starchy Foods

These provide energy, vitamins and fibre. Examples include:

- Bread, chapattis
- Breakfast cereals, oats
- Pasta
- Rice
- Potatoes, sweet potatoes
- Noodles
- Plantains, green bananas, yam
- Dishes made with maize, millet and corn meal

These foods are reported to help thicken ileostomy output, so include a variety of foods from this group and make them the main part of your meals. The low fibre versions are better tolerated so try white bread, breakfast cereals like rice krispies or cornflakes, white rice/pasta, and avoid skins on potatoes.

Protein Foods

These provide protein, vitamins and minerals which is essential for health and repair of body tissues. Examples include:

- Meat- beef, pork, bacon, lamb, liver, kidney
- Poultry- chicken, turkey
- Fish
- Eggs
- Beans, baked beans, peas, lentils
- Nut products- peanut butter, ground nuts
- Meat alternatives- textured vegetable protein, quorn, and tofu.

Include two portions from this list each day. Try to cook foods without adding extra fat. Red meats, liver, kidney, oily fish, eggs and pulses are good sources of iron so try to include these regularly.

Dairy Produce

Dairy products are a good source of calcium which is important for healthy bones. These foods also provide protein and some vitamins.

- Try to take ½ to 1 pint (300-600ml) of milk per day or its equivalent as cheese or yoghurt. One cup of milk (1/3 pint/ 200ml) contains the same amount of calcium as one small carton of yoghurt (5oz/ 150ml) or 1oz/ 30g of cheese, so these may be taken as alternatives to milk.
- Choose lower fat options whenever you can.

Fruit and Vegetables

These provide fibre and a range of vitamins and minerals which are essential for good health. Choose a wide variety

- Try to eat five portions per day
- A portion is two tablespoons of vegetables, a small salad, a piece of fruit like an apple or banana, two tablespoons of stewed/tinned fruit or a small glass (150ml) of fruit juice.

If you find that some fruits and vegetables upset you, then try:

- Peeled fruits
- Tinned fruits in natural juice
- Stewed baked or pureed fruits
- Fruit juices (unsweetened)
- Well cooked or pureed vegetables
- Vegetables in soup or casseroles, pureed if necessary

Fats and Oils

These provide energy, essential fats and some vitamins, however too much fat is not good for health so use the following foods sparingly:

- Butter
- Margarine
- Low fat spreads
- Cooking oils
- Mayonnaise and oily salad dressings

Fats and Sugar

The following foods contain fats and sugars and may be enjoyed as a treat but eat them less often and in small amounts.

- Cakes, biscuits, chocolate, sweets
- Puddings, ice cream
- Crisps
- Sugar, sweetened drinks

Alcohol

Excessive amounts of alcohol are not good for your health. Some types, such as beer may increase ileostomy output.

If you drink alcohol, take it in moderation: 3 to 4 units/day or less for men and 2 to 3 units/day or less for women, with one or two alcohol free days each week.

1 unit is equal to ½ pint of beer, a single pub measure of spirits, a small glass of sherry or a small glass of wine.

Fluid and Salt

Eight to ten cups (1.5 to 2 litres) of fluid per day are adequate for most people under normal circumstances. However, if you experience an increased output from your ileostomy then you should take extra salt rather than extra fluid, to prevent dehydration. You could try:

- Adding extra salt to foods during cooking
- Adding salt to food after serving
- Eating more salty foods such as cheese, bacon, ham, sausages, smoked fish (kippers), shell fish, canned fish (tuna, sardines, salmon), meat and fish pastes, tinned foods such as spaghetti and ravioli, meat extracts (Oxo, Bovril), yeast extracts (Marmite), salted crisps, savoury biscuits and crackers.

If your symptoms are severe, prolonged or you feel dehydrated then consult your doctor, who may recommend an oral rehydration solution for you, e.g. St Mark's Electrolyte Mix.

Meal Pattern

Meal pattern is very individual and may be affected by social circumstances.

- Try to develop a regular eating pattern for acceptable ileostomy function
- Smaller meals may be better tolerated, but in this case it is important to eat more often to ensure adequate intake.
- Aim to eat your meals in a relaxed environment
- Take your time and chew food thoroughly

Late evening meals may increase ileostomy output during the night and some people have reported benefits from changing the time of their main meal to earlier in the day or reducing the size of their evening meal.

Common questions asked by patients about food and their ileostomies

Are there any foods I should avoid?

Fibrous foods are difficult to digest and may cause a blockage if they are eaten in large quantities or are not properly chewed, so for the first 6 to 8 weeks after your operation you should avoid fibrous foods such as nuts, seeds, pips, pith, fruit and vegetable skins, raw vegetables, salad, peas, sweetcorn, mushrooms, celery, dried fruit, coconut, pineapple and mango. Once your ileostomy has settled (after 6 to 8 weeks) you may reintroduce fibrous foods in small quantities, but ensure you chew them well.

What happens if I get a blockage?

If you notice your ileostomy is not working, stop eating but continue to drink. Try drinking 3 glasses of water, rest and massage your abdomen. If this does not work within an hour, repeat the process. If you have passed nothing for 6 hours, contact your GP as soon as possible.

What happens if my ileostomy doesn't work and I've tried the above but I also have abdominal pain and vomiting?

Contact your GP as soon as possible.

Can I eat spicy food?

Spicy foods e.g. chilli and curry, may upset your ileostomy function so we recommend that in the first 6 to 8 weeks you choose mild food. After this time you may introduce more spicy food if you wish.

I'm experiencing a lot of wind. What causes this?

Wind is a normal by product of digestion, but it may be increased by swallowing air whilst eating or by eating fibrous foods. You may reduce wind caused by swallowed air by:

- Eating regular meals in a relaxed environment
- Eating slowly and chewing food carefully
- Pouring fizzy drinks (if taken) into a glass, stirring and leaving to stand for 5 minutes before drinking
- Avoiding taking drinks through a straw or chewing gum

You may reduce wind caused by fibrous foods by:

- Trying low fibre alternatives such as white bread, white rice and pasta, refined cereals like cornflakes and rice krispies.
- Reducing your intake of pulses (e.g. peas, beans, lentils), vegetables (e.g. cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, sprouts, onions, leeks, asparagus), fruits, especially skins, pith, hard or dried fruit, nuts and seeds.

Remember that people are very individual and foods which may upset one person may be well tolerated by another. Try all foods and only avoid those which repeatedly cause wind for you.

I sometimes experience a more liquid output. Which foods may cause this?

Certain foods may make your ileostomy output more liquid especially if eaten in large quantities, e.g. fibrous foods (whole meal bread, wholegrain cereals, pulses, leafy green vegetables, raw vegetables, sweetcorn, fruits, nuts), spicy foods, alcohol, drinks containing caffeine (e.g. coffee, tea, Coca cola, fruit juices, fried foods). If you eat any of these foods in large quantities, you may wish to try reducing the quantity that you eat to see if this slows your ileostomy output.

My ileostomy output has turned red, what should I do?

Certain foods like beetroot or blackcurrant drinks may discolour your ileostomy output and if you have eaten these foods there is no cause for concern. However, if you have not eaten these foods and you think you may be bleeding consult your GP.

I have to empty my ileostomy appliance during the night. Is there anything I can do to prevent this?

Late evening meals may increase your ileostomy output during the night. You may find it beneficial to eat your main meal earlier in the evening or at lunch time. If this is unhelpful, you could consult your GP or consultant about taking a medication called loperamide (which slows the movement of your bowel) before your evening meal.

What should I do if I get diarrhoea?

If you experience diarrhoea it is important to continue to take fluids and salt to prevent dehydration. If you are unable to tolerate meals, try taking salt in the form of meat extract drinks such as Oxo or Bovril, and eat dry savoury crackers. If your diarrhoea persists for 2 days or you feel dehydrated, seek medical advice from your GP.

How would I recognise dehydration?

If you are dehydrated you may experience:

- Dry, sticky mouth
- Increased thirst
- Light headedness or feeling dizzy especially when going from sitting to standing
- Tiredness
- Headache
- Passing less urine which is dark or strong smelling
- Muscle cramps

The colour of your urine is a good guide to see how well hydrated you are. A clear, pale yellow colour suggests good hydration whereas a more concentrated, dark yellow colour may indicate you are getting dehydrated. Please check the colour of your urine every day.

What happens if I get constipated?

This is most unlikely when you have an ileostomy. However, should this occur please seek advice from your GP.

My ileostomy output is offensive smelling. Is there anything I can do to prevent this?

Certain foods can cause odour, such as eggs, fish, spices and garlic. You may wish to try omitting these foods to see if this reduces the problem. Alternatively, you could try ostomy deodorant sprays and drops which can help mask odours. Ask your stoma care nurse for advice about these.

Will my ileostomy increase my risk of food poisoning and dehydration whilst on holiday abroad?

You are no more at risk of food poisoning than a person who does not have an ileostomy. However, you should follow the guidelines on food hygiene for the country you are visiting.

If you are visiting a hot country, you have an increased risk of becoming dehydrated, so it is important to increase your daily fluid and salt intake. If your urine is dark or yellow, you need to drink more. If you get diarrhoea, take an oral rehydration solution.

Summary

- Take a varied and well balanced diet for good health.
- Ensure an adequate fluid and salt intake to prevent dehydration.
- Develop a regular eating pattern for acceptable ileostomy function
- Try all foods and only avoid those which repeatedly cause unacceptable symptoms.

Useful addresses

Ileostomy and Internal Pouch Support Group

Peeverill House

1-5 Mill Road

Ballyclare

BT39 9DR

Freephone: 0800 0184 724

Telephone: 028 9334 4043

Fax: 028 9332 4606

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