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lifestyle



After stoma surgery you will need some recovery time. This can be around 3 months or maybe more depending on your individual situation. Whatever activities you enjoyed before your surgery, you should be able to take part in after your convalescence period. You are still the same person that you were before surgery and you may even find a new enthusiasm which could lead you to try new activities that have never appealed to you in the past.

Socialising

Quite soon after your surgery or maybe even before, you will find yourself thinking about whom you should tell about your stoma, how you should tell them and when you should mention it. There is no straightforward answer for this – it is entirely up to you and what you feel comfortable with. It may be awkward when you first approach the subject but family and friends are very important and can provide great support when they have a better understanding of what you are going through. Informing your close family and friends will help them as well as you.

Work

Going back to work is a major accomplishment and should be planned well in advance. It is best to discuss all options with your employer as soon as you can. Your employer may be very accommodating and offer you a range of alternatives such as part-time hours or lighter duties, if this is something that would be suitable for you.

Before starting back to work you may want to consider the following:

- It is good to have a few trial runs as many people find that their daily routine and preparation to leave the house can take them longer than they expected.
- You may need to think about clothing or your work uniform, if you have to wear one and how this may affect you. You may need a different size to what suited you before surgery.
- You may also need to consider the changing facilities that you have in your workplace to make sure you are prepared. It is advisable to have a changing bag that you can take discreetly to the toilets.

It is completely up to you if you choose to tell your colleagues about your stoma and also how many of them you tell. Whatever you feel comfortable with is best. However, it is advisable to tell at least one person in your workplace so that you have someone who may assist you if you have any issues, problems or need someone to talk to.

Finally, remember not to push yourself too hard when you start back to work, instead build up your workload gradually.

Sports and Exercise

It is a good idea to start normal day-to-day activities, such as walking, when possible. Walking is a gentle exercise that you can build up gradually at a pace that suits you. If you are walking or cycling you may wish to take a small supplies bag with you, just to be prepared. It is also advisable to take some water as if you have a stoma, in particular an ileostomy, you may become dehydrated more easily.

Exercise has many benefits such as giving you more energy, toning your body and loss of excess weight, not to mention a stronger heart and better circulation, which lead to all round better health. It is advisable to talk through an exercise program with your doctor before starting any physical activity.

Taking up sports after your recovery period should be a gradual process and you should talk to your Stoma Care Nurse about advice on how to avoid a hernia. For prevention as well as treatment of a parastomal hernia, you should try gentle abdominal exercises and managing your weight as well as using an Eakin Stoma Support Belt to provide full abdominal support. You will find more detailed information on this range of products by accessing our website www.eakin.eu and following the link to your own country page, where a brochure is available.

For contact sports, it is advisable to always wear a stoma shield to protect the stoma. For extra security you may wish to use clothing with a firmer waistband or a belt to help hold the pouch in place.

You may get a newfound ambition to pursue a new activity after your operation but remember to take things slowly, do not push yourself too hard too quickly and consult your Stoma Care Nurse for further advice.

Swimming

Swimming is a great form of gentle exercise to try once you are out of your initial recovery period. You can start off at whatever pace suits you and can build it up once your body is up to it. You can swim by yourself or with friends or family and even turn it into a social event.



There are smaller sized pouches available such as the Pelican Pouch Mini Size (available from Eakin) that some ostomates find more comfortable for swimming. Alternatively a colostomate may even be able to use a Pelican Stoma Cap or Stoma Cap Plus instead of their normal pouch.



Pelican Stoma Cap

You may find that you need to shop around to find swimwear that you are comfortable in. For women, a patterned 1-piece perhaps even with a bow or design with extra material around the abdomen may be comfortable. Alternatively tankinis may also work for you and sarongs are also a good option for the beach. For men, high-waisted shorts are a popular style to try. Like many issues you will face, each person is different, so wear what you feel comfortable in. Even try getting into the shower in your swimsuit before going swimming in public to see how it looks when wet.

Clothing

Your stoma pouch is designed to sit flat against your body so it will not be visible under most clothing. Having a stoma pouch on your abdomen does not mean that you have to start wearing baggy clothing; you can still wear fitted tops if you did so before surgery. You will not need special underwear as the pouch can be worn inside or outside of your underwear. If you decide to wear your pouch inside your underwear you may find a higher waist option of underwear more suitable, however, if you choose to wear your pouch outside of your underwear then a lower cut undergarment may be more appropriate.

Many stomas are situated just a few centimetres below the navel. It is advisable to ensure that the waist of your trousers / skirts do not sit precisely on your stoma as this could lead to damage or leakage from the pouch. Trousers with an elastic waistband sit well; however trousers that are just a little bit bigger may be just as comfortable.

Travel and Holidays

When you feel up to driving again, be sure to check with your doctor and with your car insurance company as some policies will vary in the cover that they offer. You may also wish to use a special attachment or a cloth/towel on your seatbelt to hold it slightly away from your abdomen.

No matter what mode of transport you use, you should take a small changing bag so that you are well prepared with any supplies that you may need.

When going on holiday you should consider the following:

- When flying, divide your supplies between your hand luggage and checked luggage just in case there are any problems with luggage getting lost.
- Remember the travel restrictions around liquids and sharp objects such as scissors not being permitted in your hand luggage. If you use a cut-to-fit pouch, it is a good idea to cut a few pouches for your hand luggage so that you can put your scissors in your checked luggage.
- If you do not have allocated seating on your flight it is a good idea to get to the airport in advance of your flight to try to get a seat on the plane close to the toilets.
- It is important to take enough supplies with you when you travel abroad. You may find that you perspire more in warmer climates and may need to change your pouch more regularly than you would if you were at home. You may not have access to supplies in your holiday destination so it is advisable that you bring more than enough with you. The recommended amount is usually double what your normal usage would be and that way you should be covered for all eventualities!
- Sun cream should be applied after the pouch has been put on as the cream can reduce the adhesion of your pouch. You should store your supplies in a cool dry place as adverse heat may affect their performance.
- You may wish to find out from your Stoma Care Nurse if they know of any professional assistance in the place that you are travelling to, just in case you need to contact someone when you are there.
- Your Stoma Care Nurse should be able to give you a statement to show to airport security to explain why you are carrying your supplies. The International Ostomy Association should also be able to help you obtain such a statement in the required language of the country that you are travelling to.
- You are entitled to ask to be screened by airport security in a private area as all passengers should be treated with dignity and respect.
- Before you travel you should shop around for travel insurance that adequately covers your requirements. You will most likely have to complete a medical questionnaire and must disclose any pre-existing conditions to ensure that they have the full picture before they offer you any cover.



Pregnancy and Contraception

Your stoma should not stop you from being able to become pregnant but it is best to consult with your doctor first just to be sure. A colostomate can have a normal pregnancy with a stoma but it may be necessary to alter your pouch as your pregnancy progresses. An ileostomate on the other hand may find problems with their stoma blocking as there is greater pressure upon the intestine during pregnancy.

When packing your bag for the hospital, remember to pack your stoma supplies as well. It is important to change your pouch as soon after the birth as possible as the stoma will swell due to the pressure and exertion of the labour process. If you do have your baby in the same hospital where you had your stoma surgery, your Stoma Care Nurse may even be able to come and check on you after you have given birth.

If you have a stoma and are sexually active you may wish to avoid pregnancy by using contraception. It should be remembered that the contraceptive pill works by being absorbed by the body, however, if you have a stoma this may affect the absorption of such medication so it is best to consult with your doctor before deciding on the most appropriate contraception for you.

Sex

After surgery it is up to the individual who they tell about their stoma and when. Your stoma can be well concealed under your clothes and no-one would know it is there but when it comes to sexual relations, it is impossible to conceal. It is important that you feel comfortable with your partner; communication and trust are key to establishing a sexual relationship after your surgery. Allow enough time for healing before trying to regain your full sex life but do not forget about touching, kissing and sharing a bed as these can help provide the intimacy that you and your partner need.

Once you have gone through your initial recovery period and feel ready to start having sex again do not rush yourself, find what you are comfortable with and remember to communicate with your partner. You might find it useful to experiment with different positions to find one that you are both comfortable with. Many ostomates find that a side-by-side position works well as it allows the pouch to hang down to the side and not come between them and their partner.



It is advisable to empty or change your pouch before beginning sexual activity. It may even be possible for you to wear a smaller more discreet pouch such as a Pelican Pouches Mini Size or even a Pelican Stoma Cap or Stoma Cap Plus. There is also specialist underwear available to help make you feel more comfortable and to improve your confidence in how you look.

- **Issues For Men** – The most common problem facing men is possible difficulties in your ability to get or maintain an erection long enough to ejaculate. Do not put too much pressure on yourself, it may take time after your initial recovery to achieve this but if you continue to experience problems speak to your Stoma Care Nurse as it is a common issue that they will have experience with. There will more than likely be some kind of solution.
- **Issues for Women** – The most common problem for women after surgery is the possibility of vaginal dryness. This can be overcome by using a lubricating jelly or lubricated condoms. Your doctor may also be able to advise you of other solutions suitable to your individual situation.
- **Homosexuality** – If a gay male has had his rectum removed this may cause an issue if he has previously used his rectum as a receptive orifice for intercourse. The decision to remove the rectum is as a result of medical judgment, if this would be an issue for you then you should raise this with your doctor or surgeon before the operation to see if there is any alternative. If part of the rectum is removed, the healing process should be complete before any attempt at penetration is made. The stoma should never be used as a receptive orifice for sexual purposes as this is likely to cause damage to the stoma and may lead to further surgery in order to fix the damage.





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