

Caring for Your Colostomy: Your Daily Guide

Medical-Surgical · Gastrointestinal (GI)

A colostomy is an opening on your belly, called a stoma, where stool leaves your body into a pouch. Good pouch and skin care keep you comfortable and help you spot problems early.

Check your stoma

- A healthy stoma is moist and pink to red, like the inside of your mouth.
- A little bleeding when you clean it is normal.
- **Dark red, purple, black, or pale is not normal.**
- It shrinks in the first 6 to 8 weeks. Measure it at each change.

Empty and change the pouch

- Empty the pouch when it is one-third to one-half full.
- Change the skin barrier (wafer) every 3 to 7 days, or right away if it leaks or itches.
- Cut the hole 1/8 inch (2 to 3 mm) bigger than your stoma.

Care for your skin

- Wash with warm water. Pat dry.
- Do not use oily soaps or lotions.
- Check for redness or sores at each change.

Eat and drink well

- Chew well. Try one new food at a time.
- Beans, cabbage, onions, and fizzy drinks cause gas. Eggs, fish, and garlic cause odor.

- Drink about 8 cups of fluid a day unless told otherwise.

Bathe and stay active

- Shower with the pouch on or off. Water does not hurt the stoma.
- Do not lift more than 10 pounds for 6 to 8 weeks after surgery.
- Ask your surgeon when to return to work, sports, and sex.

Call your provider today if you have

- Red, sore, or broken skin around the stoma
- A bulge around the stoma
- No stool or gas for ____ hours, with cramps
- A pale stoma or a pouch that keeps leaking

Call 911 or your local emergency number if you have

- Heavy bleeding from the stoma
- A stoma that turns dark red, purple, or black
- Severe belly pain with a swollen belly and vomiting

This handout supports, not replaces, advice from your own nurse or doctor.

Online: nclexpace.com/patient-education/colostomy-care/patient

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