

**WHAT TO EAT  
AND DRINK  
AFTER OSTOMY  
SURGERY**

**A guide for  
people with  
colorectal  
cancer**

**Nourish**

**E X T R A**

**CANADA'S NUTRITION COMPANION  
FOR ONCOLOGY PATIENTS  
AND CAREGIVERS**



# COPING WITH CHANGES TO THE DIGESTIVE TRACT

**T**reatment for colorectal cancer often includes surgery which may be combined with other treatments such as chemotherapy and radiation. Depending on the type of surgery, you may need to alter your diet to help manage changes in bowel function and ensure your body is getting the nutrition it needs to heal and stay well nourished.

Chewing food thoroughly is the important first step of digestion. When you eat, foods and fluids pass through your digestive tract where they are broken down and absorbed into the body. After they have been swallowed, foods and fluids travel through the esophagus, stomach, small intestine, large intestine, rectum and anus. What isn't absorbed, is passed out of the body as stool through the anus (**SEE ILLUSTRATION BELOW**).

Surgery for colorectal cancer may alter or shorten the digestive tract and affect the way nutrients are absorbed.

## WHAT IS AN OSTOMY?

An **OSTOMY** (or stoma) is a surgical opening from the small or large intestine to the outside of the body. Stool and gas pass out of the body through the stoma. The bag that collects the stool is placed over the stoma and is stuck to the abdomen. This opening can be either permanent or temporary.

In an **ILEOSTOMY**, the ileum (last part of the small intestine) is brought out through a stoma in the abdominal wall. A typical output through an ileostomy is loose stool with a porridge-like consistency.

A **COLOSTOMY** brings part of the colon (large intestine) out through a stoma in the abdominal wall. The stool that passes through a colostomy is typically soft and formed. The colostomy bag is usually emptied once or twice a day depending on one's diet and activity level.

## OSTOMY PLACEMENT AND NUTRIENT ABSORPTION IN THE DIGESTIVE TRACT

The following illustration shows common placements of stomas and the location of nutrient absorption. In the colon, water is absorbed from the undigested waste as it moves towards the rectum, so the consistency of the stool will depend on where the stoma is placed. As a general rule, the higher in the digestive tract the stoma is placed (e.g. ileostomy in the small intestine) the softer the output.

### NUTRIENT ABSORPTION IN SMALL INTESTINE

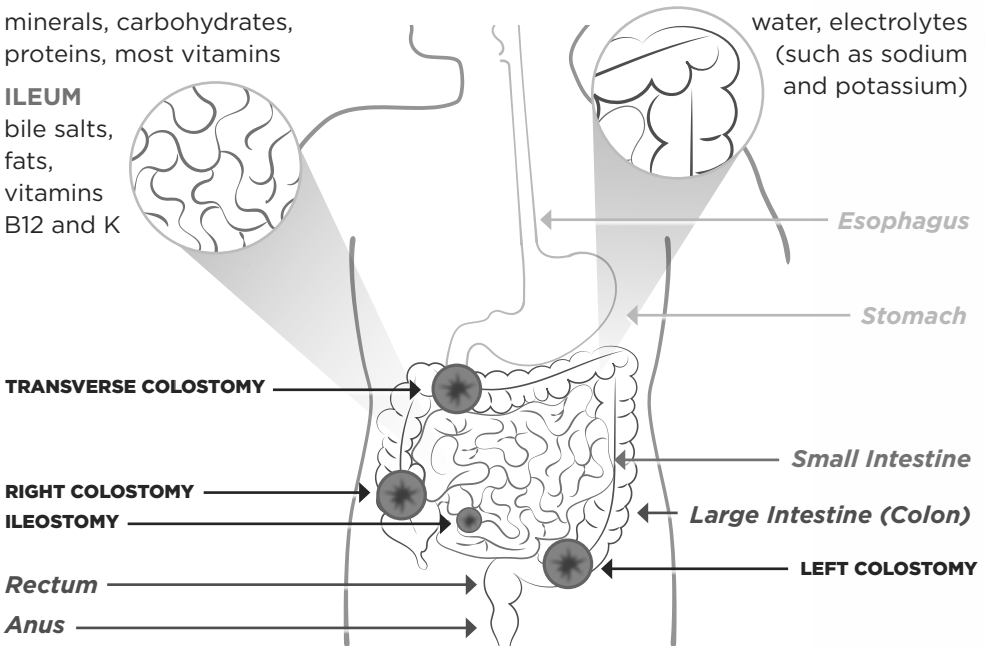
minerals, carbohydrates, proteins, most vitamins

#### ILEUM

bile salts, fats, vitamins B12 and K

### NUTRIENT ABSORPTION IN LARGE INTESTINE

water, electrolytes (such as sodium and potassium)



## WHAT TO EAT AND DRINK AFTER OSTOMY SURGERY

There is no special diet that you should be following if you have an ostomy. However, you might benefit from removing or adding certain foods to help manage issues you have with your stool output (**TABLE 1**).

Your stoma may be smaller or more swollen for the first few weeks following surgery. This can increase the risk of stoma blockage. For this reason, the following tips are important for the **first 6 to 8 weeks after ostomy surgery**:

- Eat 4 to 6 small meals throughout the day. Do not skip meals.
- Limit the amount of fibre in your diet. High fibre foods (**BOX A**) may bother you, cause pain, or block your stoma. This is only temporary and you can gradually increase the fibre after that period. Choose low-fibre foods instead (**BOX B**).
- Drink enough fluid to stay hydrated (**BOX C**).
- Chew foods thoroughly to aid digestion and prevent blocking your stoma.
- Eat slowly in a relaxed setting, if possible, to help prevent stomach gas and pain.
- Try not to swallow air. Sit upright while eating. Limit carbonated beverages and drinking from straws or bottles.
- Limit caffeine intake as it may increase output (found in coffee, teas, chocolate and some soft drinks).
- Choose foods and liquids low in lactose if you become lactose intolerant shortly after surgery (**BOX D**). Lactose is the natural sugar found in milk. Common symptoms are bloating or cramps after consuming dairy products.

### BOX A

## High Fibre Foods

### FOODS WITH INSOLUBLE FIBRE

- Dried beans, peas & lentils\*
- Dried fruit
- Nuts & seeds
- Popcorn
- Skins & seeds found in fruits and vegetables
- Wheat bran or bran cereals
- Whole grain foods (brown rice, quinoa, whole grain breads or crackers)

### FOODS WITH SOLUBLE FIBRE

- Applesauce
- Barley
- Chia seeds
- Dried beans, peas & lentils\*
- Mashed potatoes
- Oat bran & oatmeal
- Peeled pears
- Rice bran
- Rice pudding

\* These foods have both, insoluble and soluble fibre



## WHAT TO EAT AND DRINK AFTER OSTOMY REVERSAL

If you have a temporary ostomy, you can go back to emptying your bowels in the usual way after the reversal procedure. However, it will take some time before your stools become normal again. You might experience loose stools, feel the need to go often to empty your bowels or have leaky stools. Some general tips that can help you get regular more quickly include:

- Eat small, frequent meals.
- Eat foods low in fibre (**BOX B**) and gradually reintroduce high fibre foods based on your tolerance.
- Drink enough fluids.
- Avoid foods that give you gas (**TABLE 1**).
- Limit fatty foods and spicy dishes.
- Limit carbonated beverages, alcohol and caffeine.

### BOX B

## Low Fibre Foods

- Breads, crackers, pasta made with white flour
- Breakfast cereals with less than 2 grams of fibre per serving
- Fruits with seeds and skins removed
- Peeled and cooked vegetables
- White rice

**Note:** Animal-based foods do not contain fibre.



TABLE 1

## ISSUES WITH STOOL OUTPUT AFTER OSTOMY SURGERY

If you are experiencing any of the following issues with your stoma output, try adding/eliminating one food at a time to see which foods are the potential “offenders”. Every person reacts differently. The following list of food items can guide you in making better choice

### INCREASED/LOOSE STOOL

FOODS TO LIMIT	FOODS TO TRY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▼ Alcohol</li> <li>▼ Artificial sweeteners such as sorbitol and xylitol</li> <li>▼ Baked beans</li> <li>▼ Broccoli</li> <li>▼ Brussels sprouts</li> <li>▼ Cabbage</li> <li>▼ Cauliflower</li> <li>▼ Coffee</li> <li>▼ Dried beans &amp; lentils</li> <li>▼ Fatty/fried foods</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▼ Fatty meats such as bacon, salami, bologna</li> <li>▼ Foods high in insoluble fibre (see <b>BOX A</b>)</li> <li>▼ Kale</li> <li>▼ Licorice</li> <li>▼ Milk</li> <li>▼ Onions</li> <li>▼ Prune juice</li> <li>▼ Raw fruits or vegetables</li> <li>▼ Spicy foods</li> <li>▼ Sugary foods &amp; drinks</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ Applesauce</li> <li>▲ Barley</li> <li>▲ Creamy peanut butter</li> <li>▲ Foods high in pectin such as peeled apples, peaches, oranges, pears or bananas</li> <li>▲ Oatmeal or oat bran</li> <li>▲ Starchy foods such as boiled or mashed potatoes, white bread, boiled rice, white pasta</li> <li>▲ Tapioca or rice pudding</li> </ul>

### EXCESSIVE ODOR

FOODS TO LIMIT	FOODS TO TRY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▼ Asparagus</li> <li>▼ Baked beans</li> <li>▼ Brussels sprouts</li> <li>▼ Cabbage</li> <li>▼ Cauliflower</li> <li>▼ Cucumber</li> <li>▼ Eggs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▼ Fish</li> <li>▼ Garlic</li> <li>▼ Green vegetables</li> <li>▼ Kale</li> <li>▼ Onions</li> <li>▼ Peanut butter</li> <li>▼ Strong cheeses</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ Buttermilk</li> <li>▲ Cranberries</li> <li>▲ Fresh parsley</li> <li>▲ Oranges</li> <li>▲ Tomato juice</li> <li>▲ Vinegar (add to fish dishes)</li> <li>▲ Yogurt</li> </ul>

### EXCESSIVE GAS/WIND

FOODS TO LIMIT	FOODS TO TRY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▼ Asparagus</li> <li>▼ Beer</li> <li>▼ Bell peppers</li> <li>▼ Broccoli</li> <li>▼ Brussels sprouts</li> <li>▼ Cabbage</li> <li>▼ Carbonated beverages</li> <li>▼ Cauliflower</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▼ Corn</li> <li>▼ Cucumber</li> <li>▼ Dairy products</li> <li>▼ Dried beans &amp; lentils</li> <li>▼ Kale</li> <li>▼ Melon</li> <li>▼ Mushrooms</li> <li>▼ Oat bran</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▼ Onions</li> <li>▼ Peas</li> <li>▼ Radishes</li> <li>▼ Spinach</li> <li>▼ Sweet potatoes</li> <li>▼ Turnips</li> </ul>

### STOMA BLOCKAGE

FOODS TO LIMIT	FOODS TO TRY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▼ Black olives</li> <li>▼ Celery</li> <li>▼ Coconut</li> <li>▼ Dried fruit</li> <li>▼ Fruit &amp; vegetable skins</li> <li>▼ Lettuce</li> <li>▼ Mango</li> <li>▼ Meats with casings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▼ Mushrooms</li> <li>▼ Nuts/seeds</li> <li>▼ Peas</li> <li>▼ Pineapple</li> <li>▼ Popcorn</li> <li>▼ Stringy vegetables</li> <li>▼ Sweet corn</li> <li>▼ Tough &amp; stringy meats</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ Cooked vegetables</li> <li>▲ Stewed/baked/pureed fruits and vegetables</li> <li>▲ Fluids (<b>BOX C</b>)</li> </ul>

### CONSTIPATION / SMALL, DRY OR HARD TO PASS STOOL

FOODS TO TRY	FOODS TO TRY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ Bran cereals</li> <li>▲ Wheat or oat bran</li> <li>▲ Fresh fruits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ Vegetables</li> <li>▲ Whole grain breads</li> <li>▲ Prune juice</li> <li>▲ Fluids (<b>BOX C</b>)</li> </ul>

## Did you know?

If you have an ostomy, you might not be fully absorbing some nutrients and medications. Talk to your doctor or dietitian about whether or not you need to take nutritional supplements. Speak to your pharmacist about special forms of medications (e.g. liquid or gelatin medications or uncoated tablets) that may be easier for your body to absorb.

## MANAGING HIGH OUTPUTS FROM AN ILEOSTOMY

The typical output from an ileostomy is between ½-1 litre (2 to 4 cups) per 24-hour period. Outputs greater than 1500 mL (6 cups) per day are “high output ileostomies”. They can lead to dehydration, excessive loss of sodium and potassium (electrolytes) and kidney problems requiring medical attention.

**Signs of dehydration and electrolyte imbalance can include dry mouth, less urine output, dark-colored urine, feeling dizzy when standing, significant fatigue and abdominal cramping.**

Here are some tips to help manage high outputs through your ileostomy;

- Drink 1-1½ litres (4-6 cups) of an oral rehydration solution each day. You can make your own using our recipes or purchase one from the pharmacy such as Hydralyte™ or Pedialyte™. Regular sports drinks which are high in sugar, such as Gatorade™ or Powerade™ are **not** a good choice for high output ileostomies.
- Limit intake of other fluids (including plain water) to ½ litre (2 cups) per day. Avoid coffee, tea, pop, iced tea, lemonade, fruit juices and alcohol. These fluids can increase output and loss of sodium and potassium.
- Sip on fluids before or after meals.
- Sip on fluids throughout the day along with a salty, starchy snack (e.g. salted pretzels or soda crackers).
- Limit lactose as this may worsen output (**BOX D**).
- Consume foods high in potassium. (**BOX E**).
- Add extra salt to your foods (1 teaspoon per day) and choose salty foods. You can also use HalfSalt™ which contains both sodium and potassium.
- If these suggestions are not effective, talk to your doctor or registered dietitian about medications to help reduce high output.

### BOX E

## High Potassium Foods

- Artichokes
- Avocados
- Baked potatoes
- Bananas
- Bran/bran cereals
- Dried beans, peas, lentils
- Dried fruits
- Nuts/seeds
- Prune/orange/grapefruit juice
- Tomato sauce
- Vegetable/tomato juice



## ORAL REHYDRATION SOLUTION FOR HIGH OUTPUT ILEOSTOMIES

*Mix your own!*

### RECIPE 1

3 cups water  
+  
1 cup orange juice  
+  
¼ tsp Windsor Half Salt™  
+  
⅜ tsp salt

### RECIPE 2

4 cups water  
+  
6 tsp sugar  
+  
½ tsp salt

### RECIPE 3

4 cups water  
+  
8 tsp sugar  
+  
1 tsp salt  
+  
1 cup orange juice

## Staying Hydrated

No matter which type of stoma you have, it is important to drink plenty of fluids to keep your stoma functioning and prevent dehydration. Drink 1½–2 litres (6–8 cups) of fluid per day. Anything that is liquid at room temperature counts as fluid (e.g. water, milk, soups). Tired of drinking plain water? Try our infused water recipes. If you are experiencing higher stool output, add extra salt to your foods or add some higher sodium foods (e.g. soups, pretzels, salted crackers).

## Tips to Reduce Lactose

- Limit dairy milk, yogurt and soft cheeses to small amounts at one time
- Try hard cheeses which are low in lactose (gouda, havarti, cheddar, parmesan)
- Try lactose-free milk or soy beverage and lactose-free yogurt
- Speak with your dietitian about possibly including commercial nutritional supplements that are low in lactose

## INFUSED WATER

*How to add flavour to plain water*



Fill a mason jar or jug with water in the morning and add the flavours you enjoy:

- Orange or lemon slices
- Watermelon pieces and basil leaves
- Cucumber slices
- Piece of pineapple and blueberries
- Strawberry slices with mint leaves
- Lemon slices with sprig of thyme
- Lime and a piece of ginger root
- Frozen berries

## RESOURCES

**Ostomy Canada Society**  
www.ostomycanada.ca

**Vancouver United Ostomy Association:**  
A handbook for new ostomy patients.  
www.uoavancouver.com/publications.html

**United Ostomy Associations of America:**  
Type “eating with an ostomy” in search field.  
www.ostomy.org

**BC Cancer:** Type “low fibre food choices” in search field.  
www.bccancer.bc.ca

**Alberta Health Services:** How to increase fibre. Type “fibre facts” in search field.  
www.albertahealthservices.ca

**Colorectal Cancer Canada**  
www.colorectalcancer.ca

**Nourish Extra guides for people with colorectal cancer: Part 1: What to eat and drink after ostomy surgery, Part 2: Managing nutrition-related side effects, Part 3: Eat well after treatment.**

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