



# A guide to **Common Stoma** Problems



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# A guide to common stoma problems

There are all sorts of issues that arise when you have a stoma. In this booklet we go through some of the more common problems which may occur and suggest some helpful tips for things you can do to combat or even prevent them.

## Skin problems

### Sore Skin around the Stoma

Soreness can often occur when:

- **Base plates are changed too often**

In some cases base plates do not need changing as often as pouches and it may be worth trying a two-piece system which allows you to change a pouch without always having to change a base plate

- **There is leakage of output onto the skin**

To avoid leakage make sure that your stoma is measured on a regular basis and the base plate size changed accordingly. This is particularly important if you have experienced any kind of change in your weight which in turn may alter the size of your stoma

A belt can also be worn with two-piece and convex appliances to help prevent them leaking

- **Hair follicles become inflamed**  
This can be due to improper shaving of the area. If you do shave the area, make sure it is not too often and that adequate hygiene is maintained. A clean disposable razor must be used each time
- **Soap is used to wash the area**  
Instead of soap use water and dry wipes or a mild unperfumed soap. Fittleworth supplies complimentary dry wipes to help with this

Please note that many nurses recommend that you do not use wet wipes on or around the stoma as this can cause irritation. If you do use wet wipes and suffer from sore skin, try stopping for a while and only use dry wipes and water, to see if your skin improves



- **You are sensitive to the adhesive, other products or to certain food.**  
To help with this try some alternative appliances or use skin protectors such as protective wafers or wipes
- **Sweating occurs due to the plastic pouch sitting close to the skin**  
To stop sweating, particularly in hot weather, you can use a cotton pouch cover which is placed over the top of the plastic pouch. These are available on prescription through Fittleworth



A skin protection film can be used on sore skin and help the appliance adhere.

For very sore skin a 'skin blanket' can be applied onto the skin before putting on a new appliance which also acts as a skin barrier between the skin and the adhesive.



An example of skin protective paste

Large areas of skin that are red, sore, and weeping (always wet) may prevent you from getting a good seal around your stoma. It is therefore important to treat minor irritations before they worsen.

If you have any irritation or sore skin that does not clear up after a few days contact your stoma care nurse.

## Bleeding

You may notice slight bleeding from the surface of your stoma. This is normal and can be caused by cleaning the stoma too harshly. It is also normal for some stomas to bleed when you change your pouch.

Take care when changing your pouch and cleaning the area. However if the bleeding persists or you have any other concerns then you should contact your stoma care nurse for advice.

Bleeding can also be caused by friction from an ill-fitting appliance. To prevent this from occurring, regularly check the site of the hole on the base plate or flange is correct. Your stoma nurse can assist with this.

If there is blood in the contents of the pouch, seek medical advice.

## Wind

The presence of excessive flatus (wind) can dislodge your pouch and cause leakage. Different types of food and drink consumed could cause excessive wind, and will affect different people in different ways.

It is helpful to keep a diary of your intake as this will allow you to see if there is a particular food or drink that is causing the problem.

Remember that most people find that foods which have previously caused them upset will still generally have the same effect.



### To aid reduction of wind:

- Eat meals slowly and chew food well
- Avoid chewing gum
- Try to eat without talking
- Eat small/medium regular meals
- Try not to miss a meal
- Do not consume liquids during meals, avoid fizzy drinks
- Take peppermint oil, tablets or tea
- Try charcoal tablets which may also have a deodorising effect

Once you have identified foods that give you wind gradually re-introduce them, but eat them in moderation and in convenience with your lifestyle.

A dietary advice leaflet is available from Fittleworth – please request a copy from one of our dedicated Customer Service team.

Excessive wind can also cause 'ballooning', where the pouch inflates. To avoid this you can either change to a pouch with a double filter, or obtain extra filters from Fittleworth free of charge.

## Odour

If you notice any unpleasant odours from your pouch it may be that you have developed a leak – you should check that the pouch is fitted correctly to avoid this.

Remember that some foods will also increase odour, particularly if eaten in large quantities – these include:

- Baked beans
- Onion
- Egg
- Certain cheeses
- Peas
- Cabbage
- Fish
- Alcohol

There are many different odourisers available in the form of sprays or drops which are inserted into your pouch, all of which are available on prescription through Fittleworth.



## Pancaking

'Pancaking' is caused by firmer stools sticking to the stoma and not moving down into the pouch correctly. It can cause problems often leading to leakage and sore skin.

Below are several ways that may help to reduce pancaking:

- Rub a small amount of baby oil into the top of the pouch, avoiding the filter, which will help the stools to slide into the bag
- Add a filter cover to the filter to prevent too much air escaping and keep the sides of the pouch apart
- Place a small piece of screwed up tissue or cotton wool inside the pouch, again to keep the sides apart
- Increase your fluid intake to help soften stools
- Try blowing some air into the pouch before applying it

There are specific accessories and products available on prescription which can assist with pancaking.

For more information please contact your stoma care nurse or speak to one of Fittleworth's Customer Service team.

## Diarrhoea (increased liquid output)

Possible causes of diarrhoea include certain foods such as:

- Spicy food
- Bakes beans
- Peas
- Chocolate
- Prunes
- Spinach
- Raw fruit

Other factors could include excessive alcohol consumption, stress or an underlying medical condition.

Some types of medication and food may alter the colour and consistency of your output. Eating marshmallows, unripe bananas or smooth peanut butter may help to solidify the contents.

It is also important to keep well hydrated by increasing your fluid and salt intake.

'Discharge Solidifying Agents' are available on prescription which can be placed in a pouch to solidify the contents.



Speak to one of our Customer Service team for products available, or contact your stoma care nurse for advice.

If you have an ileostomy, generally your output will normally look loose and may resemble diarrhoea – this is nothing to worry about. If, however, you feel unwell, the output is watery and your pouch needs emptying more than 4 to 6 times a day and this continues for more than 24 hours it is advisable to seek medical help.

For more information please see our dietary advice leaflets, obtained through our Customer Service team, or contact your stoma care nurse.

### Common Colostomy Problems Constipation

Constipation can occasionally cause problems; however there are one or two simple remedies to try before seeking further help:

- Increase fresh fruit and/or fresh fruit juice, vegetables and high fibre foods
- Increase fluid intake, especially when eating more fibre

Try, where possible, to do some gentle exercises such as walking or swimming

## Common Urostomy Problems

### Urinary Crystals

Urinary crystals on the stoma or skin are linked to alkaline urine – the crystals look like white, gritty particles and may lead to stoma irritation or bleeding of the stoma.

**You should try to keep your urine acidic through:**

- Drinking cranberry juice
- Eating live yoghurt
- Keeping well-hydrated by drinking water

Proper cleaning and careful fitting of the pouch will also help to prevent urinary crystals forming. There are also gels and washes available to help reduce urinary crystals – please contact your stoma care nurse for more information

### Mucous Build Up

The appearance of mucous is normal as your urostomy is made from a piece of bowel. It looks white and sticky and can commonly be mistaken as a sign of infection.

### Urine Infection

If your urine is cloudy, and has an offensive odour, or is thicker and darker than normal or if you feel shivery, have a high temperature, nausea or vomiting then you may have a urine infection and should contact your GP or stoma care nurse for advice.

Taking supplements such as Vitamin C and cranberry juice can help infection problems. However advice must be taken from your GP or stoma care nurse prior to taking these, as they can interfere with certain medications that you may be prescribed, such as Warfarin. It is also important to maintain good hygiene each day.

### A Good Night's Rest

A leg bag or night bag can be attached to a urostomy pouch to give greater capacity and help provide you with an uninterrupted night's sleep. These are available on prescription through Fittleworth and your stoma care nurse can advise you as to which leg bags or night bags are suitable.



## Common Ileostomy Problems

### Dehydration

If you experience symptoms such as tiredness, leg cramps, thirst, lightheadedness or headaches, you could be dehydrated – make sure you are drinking enough fluids for your needs.

### Blockages

If the bowel motion from your stoma has stopped for longer than is usual or your bag contains a lot of watery fluid, you could have a blockage.

If the colour, amount, consistency of your bowel motion changes significantly or your stoma swells in size and becomes a deeper red colour, you may also have a blockage.

You should contact your doctor or specialist nurse if you feel unwell with stomach pains, nausea (feeling sick) or vomiting.

## General Advice

Ensure that your appliance does not become too full as this can pull the pouch down and may pull it off. To avoid this you should change or empty your pouch when the contents reach the half-way mark.

If your stoma changes colour, size or shape you should contact your stoma care nurse.

If your stoma stops working and you have abdominal pain/discomfort you may need medical assistance. Never stop taking any medication without consulting your GP.

*This leaflet has been produced with the kind assistance of the stoma care nursing team at the Royal Berkshire Hospital and various other hospitals in the UK and the clinical nurse advisors at Fittleworth.*



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