

Dietary advice when you have a colostomy

Advice on what to eat and drink when you have a colostomy.

Your name: _____

Your dietitian: _____

Dietitian contact number: **0118 322 7116**

What is a colostomy?

A colostomy is a surgical procedure that brings out the healthy end of the large intestine, also known as the colon, through the front of the abdomen forming a stoma (opening) from which a pouch is connected to collect stool (poo) excreted by the bowel.

What can I eat?

For the first 4-8 weeks after your colostomy has been formed, your bowel may be swollen, which may affect how well your food is absorbed. Therefore you may find it beneficial to have 3 small, easily digested meals each day with 2-3 snacks or nutritional drinks in between. Remember to eat slowly and chew your food well.

Once your bowels are working more normally, there are no specific foods that you need to avoid, but you may find that some foods upset you or cause unpleasant symptoms. More information about foods that may cause problems will be discussed later on in this leaflet.

What is a balanced diet?

A balanced diet contains foods from each of the following 5 food groups, in the correct proportions. This will mean your body gets all the nutrients that it needs.

<p>Potatoes, bread and cereals</p> <p>Include these with every meal and snack. High fibre varieties (such as wholemeal bread and pasta, wholegrain cereals) can help relieve constipation, but some people may find these cause wind or loose stools. It is recommended that you consume 7-14 portions per day.</p> <p>A portion includes one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2-4 tablespoons (tbsp) cereal • 1 slice of bread • 2-3 crispbreads or crackers • 2-3 tbsp rice, pasta or mashed potato • 2 new potatoes or half a baked potato 	<p>Meat, fish, eggs and alternatives</p> <p>Have 2-3 servings daily. Alternatives include beans and pulses but avoid large portions of these if you find that they upset you. A serving includes one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2-3 oz (60-85g) meat, poultry or vegetarian alternative • 4-5 oz (120-140g) fish • 2 eggs • 2 tbsp nuts • 3 tbsp beans, lentils
--	--

<p>Dairy products</p> <p>Try to have 3 portions of milk, cheese and yoghurt daily. Use full fat products if your appetite is poor or you are trying to gain weight.</p> <p>A portion of dairy includes one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1/3 pint of milk • Small pot yoghurt • 2 tbsp cottage cheese • 1 1/2 oz (40-45g, matchbox size) cheese 	<p>Fruit and vegetables</p> <p>Aim to have 5 portions per day. A portion includes one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Banana or apple • 1 slice of melon • 2 plums • 1 small glass of fruit juice or smoothie • 1 handful of grapes • 1 cereal bowl of salad • 3 heaped tbsp of vegetables • 2 new potatoes or half a baked potato
<p>Foods containing fat and sugar</p> <p>These include cooking and spreading fats, sugar, cakes, biscuits, crisps and so on. These can be eaten more if your appetite is poor or if weight gain is desired. If you need to build up your dietary intake or weight, snacks between meals are a good idea. Suitable snacks include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheese and biscuits • Yoghurt and fruit • Small sandwich or cake • Cereal with full fat milk • Packet of crisps or mini cheddar biscuits 	<p>Fluid</p> <p>One of the main jobs of the colon is to absorb water, but you may find that in the first few weeks after your operation, you may not absorb water as efficiently. It is very important to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. Aim for at least 2 litres (10 cups) of fluid daily. All non-alcoholic drinks count. The following drinks are good options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruit squashes or diluted fruit juice • "Isotonic" sports drinks • Milkshakes and milky drinks e.g. hot chocolate, Horlicks, Ovaltine • Fizzy drinks such as lemonade or flavoured water – stirred or shaken to remove the fizz <p>You will need to drink even more fluids if you do any physical exercise or if the weather is very hot.</p>

Are there any foods I need to avoid?

It is possible that some foods may cause unpleasant symptoms. Only avoid foods that you find upset you, as everybody is different.

If you find that a food causes a problem initially, you may find that your tolerance improves with time. Therefore, aim to retry any problem foods every few weeks. If you experience problems with a particular food, you may decide to eat that food only when at home, and avoid it in social situations.

Foods that *may* increase/quicken stoma output:

- Fatty or spicy foods
- Alcohol
- Fruit juice
- Dried fruit
- Rhubarb
- Green leafy vegetables
- Peas
- Beans
- Sweetcorn
- Celery
- Oily dressings
- Chocolate

Note: gelatine containing foods like jelly babies and marshmallows *may* thicken the stool and slow down its passage through the bowel. Be aware that these are high in sugar, if you have diabetes.

Foods that *may* cause wind:

- Fizzy drinks
- Beer
- Baked beans
- Lentils
- Peas
- Cabbage
- Brussels sprouts
- Leeks
- Onions
- Cucumber
- Artichokes
- Asparagus
- Bananas
- Curry
- Nuts

Foods that *may* increase odour of stoma output:

- Onions
- Garlic
- Brussels sprouts
- Cabbage
- Broccoli
- Cauliflower
- Parsnip
- Turnip
- Beans
- Fish
- Eggs

Note: fruit juices, yoghurt or parsley may help to control the odour.

Food that *may* change the colour of stoma output:

- Beetroot

Notes

Berkshire Healthcare Dietitians:

East Berks: 01753 636 724 West Berks: 01635 273 710

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

Produced by: Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust Dietitians, March 2026.
Next review due: March 2028.