



## CARING FOR YOUR OSTOMY

Having an ostomy procedure is a life changing experience for you and your family. Learning how to take care of your ostomy will help you to gain independence and live your life with comfort and confidence.

### WHAT IS AN OSTOMY?

An ostomy is a surgical opening created from your intestine or urinary tract to the surface of your abdomen. This opening is called a stoma and it is created to remove feces or urine from your body. An ostomy appliance is placed over the stoma to collect the feces or urine. The **odour proof ostomy pouch** needs to be emptied and cleaned throughout the day. This type of operation can be done for newborns, children and adults.

### IF YOU NEED TO HAVE AN OSTOMY OR HAVE ONE ALREADY...

Speak to your **Enterostomal Therapy Nurse (ET Nurse)** or nurse. The nurse will teach and help prepare you and your family for the ostomy, answer your questions and listen to your concerns. If you are caring for a loved one with an ostomy, the nurse will teach you how to care for the ostomy.

Your nurse will give you information about **taking care of your ostomy** so you will become independent. This includes:

- Caring for your ostomy appliance;
- Caring for your skin to prevent problems;
- Preventing leakage to control odour from your ostomy appliance;
- Eating foods that are healthy for you and your ostomy; and
- Where to get follow-up care, counseling and emergency contact information.



This is an example of what an ostomy looks like on the outside of your abdomen after surgery. The red-coloured opening is the stoma, which empties waste from your body.

### WILL HAVING AN OSTOMY AFFECT MY LIFESTYLE?

Having an ostomy is a life changing experience. If you have an ostomy, you should still be able to work, play sports, exercise and lead an active life. Your nurse can guide you on how to maintain your lifestyle. If you are not able to go back to your usual routine, speak to your nurse to find out what you can do.

Attend ostomy learning sessions and ask your family to be involved. This can help them to better understand your condition and learn how they can help you.

For parents, if your child has an ostomy, you should inform the child's teacher or care provider. If your child has a problem or accident with the ostomy appliance at school, then the teacher will have an understanding of your child's condition and know how to help.

## HOW DO I CARE FOR MY OSTOMY?

Your ET Nurse or nurse will teach you and/or your family how to care for your ostomy at home. Here are some tips when caring for your ostomy:

### Skin care around your stoma

- Use warm water and a soft tissue or cloth to clean around the stoma.
- Do not use creams or oils. These will prevent your ostomy appliance from sealing around your stoma.
- If the skin around the stoma has a lot of hair, clip the area using scissors. This will help the ostomy appliance to stick to your skin better.

### Cleaning your ostomy pouch

- Ostomy pouches can be washed with warm soapy water and reused. Let the ostomy pouch dry completely before reusing.
- You should always have more than one ostomy pouch on-hand.
- Always empty the ostomy pouch into the toilet when it is 1/3 full.
- Empty the ostomy pouch first before throwing it away into the garbage. Ostomy pouches should never be flushed down the toilet.

### Bathing

- Bathing does not hurt the stoma.
- Showers are recommended over baths since there is less soaking of the ostomy pouch when showering.
- Avoid using bath oils, and salts in the water. These will prevent your ostomy appliance from sticking to your skin.
- You can bathe with the ostomy appliance on or off.

### Diet

- Regaining a normal diet will take time. Some changes may be necessary.
- Your nurse will refer you to a Registered Dietician who can answer questions and concerns you may have about your diet.
- Always chew your food as much as possible to help your body break down the food.
- Drink 8-10 cups of fluid every day.

## WHAT DO I DO IF MY OSTOMY APPLIANCE IS LEAKING?

Always be prepared should your ostomy appliance begin to leak. You should keep extra supplies on hand in places you regularly visit, such as at your work or in your car. You can also carry a small ostomy travel bag with you so that you can change your ostomy appliance anywhere, as needed. Ask your nurse where you can get an ostomy travel bag.

## JOIN YOUR LOCAL OSTOMY SUPPORT GROUP!

Your local United Ostomy Association (UOA) ostomy support group provides self-help and support for people and families of those with an ostomy. By sharing experiences, information and coping strategies you and your family will learn that you are not alone. Ask your family to attend these meetings with you. Your nurse can let you know how you can join your local ostomy support chapter.

### Reference:

Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (2009). *Ostomy Care and Management*. Toronto: Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario.

