

Getting ready for ostomy surgery: A fact sheet for adults

What is an ostomy?

An ostomy is an opening in your abdomen, created through surgery to allow the removal of waste (stool or urine) from your body. The surgery results in a stoma. An ostomy bag (pouch) is placed over your stoma to collect the waste and protect the skin. Your ostomy may be permanent or temporary.

Will having an ostomy change my life?

An ostomy surgery is a life-saving procedure. But getting an ostomy may cause changes to your daily life. You may experience changes in your diet, exercise or intimacy.



What kind of problems can happen related to my ostomy?

You may experience problems related to your ostomy, such as:

- dehydration
- leakage from your stoma
- skin around the stoma sticking out (parastomal hernia)
- a block in your bowels (often caused by food)
- damage or irritation to skin around the stoma

But don't worry. Remember that you are not alone. Your health provider is available to support you prevent the problems or manage them if they do happen.

Who can help me with my ostomy?

You can live an active and meaningful life after getting an ostomy. Health providers who can provide guidance or resources regarding your ostomy include:

- nurses specialized in wound, ostomy and continence
- doctors (such as colorectal surgeons)
- social workers
- dietitians
- pharmacists

What do you need to know if you are getting an ostomy surgery?

Speak to your nurse or doctor to learn more about what to expect before and after your ostomy surgery. It is important to take good care of your ostomy every day. You can also have someone else help you with this. The checklist below can help you keep track of what you need to know before and after your surgery, and when you go home from the hospital.

Before surgery (3 weeks before surgery)	After surgery (in the hospital)	After surgery (at home)
Have your stoma site marking explained	Day of surgery: Look at your stoma	Meet with your community care nurse for support
Learn about your ostomy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How your bowel works • What your surgery will be like • The type of stoma you will get • How the stoma works • The type of ostomy bag or pouch you can use • What problems can happen • Ostomy supplies: where to buy, cost, financial support • Ostomy Buddy/Journey coach 	Day 1 after surgery: Empty your pouch with the nurse	Receive follow-up care from the hospital or community nurse 7-10 days and 2, 4 & 6 weeks after discharge
	Day 2 after surgery: 1) Empty your pouch on your own 2) Participate in your pouching system change	Collect more information about ostomy related lifestyle considerations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long you can wear a pouch • Changes to your daily life • Ostomy support groups & resources
	Day 3/4 after surgery: Change your pouching system on your own	
Receive and review pre-operative practice pack	Discuss and understand any changes in your diet that you will need to make	Collect more information about problems that might happen with your ostomy
Practice wearing a pouching system; opening & closing the pouch	Make sure that you receive referrals to community care services	Know who to call and what to do in an emergency
Review changes that you will need to make to your daily life	Get your ostomy supplies from the hospital	
Discuss how to find a community nurse after you leave the hospital	Review the information that you received before surgery	
	Have your family or support person participate in your ostomy care	

This health education fact sheet was developed using content from the RNAO Best Practice Guideline (BPG), *Supporting Adults Who Anticipate or Live with an Ostomy* (2019). Its purpose is to provide you with information and to help you make decisions about your health. All of RNAO's BPGs are available for public viewing and free download at <https://RNAO.ca/bestpractices>. The ostomy BPG is available at <https://rnao.ca/bpg/guidelines/ostomy>.