

Eating Well after Colostomy Surgery

What is a colostomy?

A **colostomy** is an opening that is made from the colon (large bowel) to the skin on your abdomen. You may need an ostomy because of a disease or an injury. You may have an ostomy for a short time or for the rest of your life.

A **stoma** is the opening in the abdomen where the colon is brought to the skin.

Your colon absorbs water, minerals, and vitamins from food digested in your small bowel. It then forms stool and moves it to your rectum.

When you have a colostomy, an ostomy pouch or bag collects stool as it passes from your body through the stoma.

Output is the amount of stool put out by your ostomy.

Nutrition guidelines for the first 6–8 weeks after surgery

From now until _____ (date)

For the first 6–8 weeks after surgery, your bowel is healing. During this time, some foods may cause bloating, cramping, or gas.

Spread 4–6 small meals throughout the day. Don't skip meals.

Eating moderate amounts of food several times a day promotes normal bowel habits. Small meals in the evening may slow your ostomy output at night.

You may be asked to eat a low fibre diet.

Right after surgery, higher fibre foods may bother you, cause pain, or even block the stoma.

For 6–8 weeks after surgery:

Choose lower fibre foods

- vegetables and fruits **without** skins or seeds
- puffed cereals
- white bread
- white rice or pasta
- tortillas made with white flour
- beef, chicken, turkey, fish, eggs, tofu
- milk products
- most soups

Avoid higher fibre foods

- vegetables and fruits **with** skin or seeds
- dried fruit
- bran cereals
- brown rice or pasta
- whole grain or whole wheat breads, cereals, muffins
- legumes (peas, beans, lentils)
- nuts and seeds
- popcorn

Drink 9–12 cups (2.25–3 L) of fluid every day.

Drinking enough fluid is important for your ostomy to work properly and to avoid being dehydrated.

Signs of dehydration include:

- dry mouth
- dry skin
- headaches
- feeling thirsty
- feeling dizzy
- muscle cramping
- nausea
- low blood pressure
- low urine output or dark urine
- weight loss

Fluid includes water and other liquids such as milk, coffee, tea, broth, and soup.

Drink more fluids after you're active and when it's hot outside.

Eat enough protein.

You need more protein for healing after surgery. Protein helps you maintain muscle, heal your wound, and have a healthy immune system. Try to eat protein foods at each meal and snack.

Choose these protein foods:

- cheese
- cottage cheese
- eggs
- fortified soy beverage
- meat, poultry, fish
- milk
- peanut butter and other nut butters (smooth)
- tofu
- Greek or Icelandic yogurt



Chew foods well.

Chewing well helps you digest food and prevents chunks of food from becoming stuck in your bowel or stoma.

Eat slowly and in a relaxed setting.

Eat slowly, and in a place where you can relax and feel comfortable. This helps to prevent stomach gas and pain.

Try not to swallow air.

To cut down on stomach gas and pain:

- Sit upright while eating.
- Don't drink from straws or bottles.
- Limit or avoid carbonated (fizzy) drinks.
- Do not chew gum.

Sample meal plan for the first 6–8 weeks after surgery

The meal ideas in the sample meal plan below show how you can use some of the eating choices in this handout, such as choosing foods lower in fibre. These are examples only—the best meals for you may look different from these. There is space to write your own ideas for meals.

Sample Meal Plan	My Meal Plan
Breakfast	
2 slices of white toast 1 tsp (5 mL) margarine 2 whole eggs scrambled (or 3–4 egg whites scrambled) ½ cup (125 mL) soft honeydew melon cubes	
Lunch	
Sandwich made with: 2 slices of white bread ½ cup (125 mL) canned tuna, rinsed 2 leaves lettuce, chopped 1 Tbsp (15 mL) low fat mayonnaise ½ cup (125 mL) cucumber, peeled and seeds removed 1 Tbsp (15 mL) salad dressing ½ cup (125 mL) applesauce	
Snack	
1½ ounces (50 g) cheese and 6 melba toasts (30 g)	
Supper	
3 oz (90 g) meatballs ½ cup (125 mL) cooked white pasta ½ cup (125 mL) tomato sauce ½ cup (125 mL) cooked sliced carrots ½ cup (125 mL) canned peaches	
Snack	
¾ cup (175 mL) Greek yogurt with no nuts or seeds and ½ cup (125 mL) canned fruit	

Diarrhea

After colostomy surgery, most people don't have problems with diarrhea.

If you have diarrhea for more than 2–3 days, tell your doctor or healthcare provider.

Odour (smell)

It is normal for stool to smell. **Foods that may reduce the odour are:**

- buttermilk
- cranberry, orange, and tomato juices
- parsley
- yogurt

Constipation

Constipation is when it's hard to pass stool through the stoma. Your stool output may be:

- hard and dry
- happening less than 3 times per week

Having less output doesn't always mean you're constipated. Your usual output will not be the same as other people's usual output.

If your output follows a regular pattern, the stool is soft, and it passes easily through your stoma, you are likely not constipated.

If you become constipated:

- Drink more fluids.
- Slowly start to eat higher fibre foods (see the *Avoid higher fibre foods* list on page 1).
- Ask your doctor, dietitian, or healthcare provider for more information on higher fibre foods.

Talk to your doctor before you use any laxatives.

Nutrition guidelines after healing

About 6–8 weeks after surgery:

_____ (date)

After your bowel has healed and your ostomy is working well, you can go back to your usual diet.

- Use Canada's Food Guide to eat a variety of healthy foods every day. Visit Canada.ca/FoodGuide.
- Although you can go back to your usual diet after a colostomy, some foods may keep causing diarrhea, gas, or odour for you.
- **Different people tolerate different foods. A food that bothers you may not bother someone else.**
- Try new foods one at a time. Try the new foods at least three separate times before you decide that you can't eat them.
- Write down the names of foods you try, and whether they cause diarrhea, gas, or odour.
- Introduce foods with fibre slowly. Too much fibre too soon can cause pain, gas, and bloating.
- Drink 9–12 cups (2.25–3 L) of fluid every day.
- See the next page for a list of foods that might bother you after colostomy surgery.



Foods that might be a problem after colostomy surgery

Below are common foods that bother some people with a colostomy, even after healing. If these foods are not a problem for you, you don't need to avoid them.

Food group	May cause blockage	May cause gas or odour
Vegetables and fruits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cabbage • celery • corn • dried fruit • lettuce • mushrooms • olives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • peas • peels/skins and seeds of fruits and vegetables • pineapple • raw vegetables • spinach, kale
Grain foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • whole wheat foods • whole grain foods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • multigrain foods • bran products
Protein foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • casings of sausage or wieners • coconut 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • nuts and seeds (does not include smooth nut and seed butters) • tough, stringy meat
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • popcorn 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • asparagus* • broccoli • Brussels sprouts • cabbage • cauliflower • cucumber • garlic* • melons • onions • peas • prunes and raisins • radishes • sauerkraut • turnip* • strong cheeses: blue cheese, Roquefort, old cheeses • peas, beans, and lentils • eggs* • fish/seafood* • alcohol, beer • carbonated beverages • chewing gum • coffee* • higher fat foods: cream sauces, gravy, ice cream • spicy foods

* These foods only cause odour.

If you have problems

If you are having problems or need more information, call **811 Health Link**.

Notes and contacts: