



# Ostomy Nutrition Guide

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University of  
Pittsburgh  
Medical Center  
Information  
for Patients

## Introduction

This booklet is designed to help answer questions you may have about the way diet affects your ostomy. Our hospital dietitians and enterostomal therapists are health professionals specially trained to help you and your family with any dietary concerns, both while you are in the hospital and after you are discharged. If you have any questions regarding your diet, call your dietitian or your physician's office.

## General information

Eating is one of life's great pleasures. Having an ostomy should not change your enjoyment of food. Most people with ostomies return to their normal diet soon after the operation. Many individuals with ostomies can enjoy a normal diet; however, food tolerances can vary from person to person. The most important dietary concerns for ostomy patients are preventing blockage and avoiding foods that produce unpleasant odors or gas.

The following general guidelines will help make caring for your ostomy easier:

- **Eat meals regularly.** You should eat three or more times a day. An ostomy works best this way and produces less gas.
- **Chew your food well.** If you have an ileostomy, be especially careful when chewing foods that may be hard to digest or foods that have a high fiber content. Chewing well will help to avoid a blockage at your stoma site.
- **Try new foods one at a time.** Learn which foods may give you annoying side effects such as excess gas, constipation, a looser stool, or odor. If a new food seems to give you problems, eliminate it for a few weeks, but try it again later. You may find something else was causing your problem.
- **Avoid gaining excess weight.** Once you're on the road to recovery, you should avoid gaining excess weight. Extra weight is not good for your ostomy, and it can cause health problems in general.
- **Drink a lot of fluid daily.** You may lose more body fluids than usual through the stoma, so it's important to drink a lot of fluid. Ileostomy patients and colostomy patients who have lost a large part or all of their large intestine will especially notice more fluid loss. This is because most of the body's fluid is normally reabsorbed in the large intestine.
- **Above all, remember that no two people will react the same to foods.** You will learn through experience which foods, if any, you should avoid.

## **Preventing blockage**

There are no real restrictions to your diet, unless you experience a problem with a particular food. The possibility of blockage of the stoma is usually only a concern if you have an ileostomy. Certain foods, if eaten in large amounts or not chewed well, may cause a blockage at the stoma opening.

Use caution when eating the following foods, because they are not completely digestible and could cause blockage:

- celery
- popcorn
- Chinese vegetables
- coconut skins
- raw pineapple
- coleslaw
- raisins  
(and other dried fruits)
- nuts
- seeds
- peas
- vegetable
- mushrooms
- salad greens
- relishes

You do not need to avoid these foods. Just eat small amounts and be sure to chew them well.

## **Reducing odor**

If you experience a problem with odor, you may try making some changes in your diet. Cleanliness and odor-resistant appliances also play a big part in controlling odor.

The following are known to produce odor:

- alcohol
- cauliflower
- asparagus
- fish
- brussels sprouts
- cheese (certain types)
- baked beans
- eggs
- broccoli
- onions
- cabbage

Do not eliminate these automatically. If you experience a problem after eating one of these foods, try a small amount again in a few weeks to be sure. Always experiment before cutting out your favorite foods.

Buttermilk, parsley, and yogurt may help reduce odor. You can include one of them in your daily diet.

Certain vitamins and drugs can cause odor, so remind your doctor that you have an ostomy when he is prescribing medication for you.

## **Reducing gas**

Everyone produces gas along with bowel movements. Some gas is normal, and it is always to be expected. If excess gas becomes a problem for you, it can be controlled to some degree by your diet. Factors such as when and how you eat certain foods can help reduce gas production. Try following these tips:

- Eat regularly. Skipping meals is likely to produce gas.
- Avoid swallowing air while eating. You can do this by taking your time when eating. Relax and don't talk with your mouth full.
- Avoid chewing gum or drinking through a straw. These activities can also cause you to swallow air.

The following foods and beverages are just a few that may cause excess gas. If you are bothered by gas, you can try eliminating these foods altogether. Or you can try to avoid having more than one of them at one meal. Again, do not eliminate these foods unless you are sure they are really responsible for the unpleasant side effects.

- asparagus
- beer
- broccoli
- brussels sprouts
- cabbage
- cauliflower
- cucumbers
- dried peas and beans
- fish
- melons
- milk
- nuts
- onion
- radishes
- soda
- sweets

## Relieving constipation

Constipation (stools that are small, dry, and/or hard to pass) is a different problem from blockage (undigested food blocking the stoma). If you have a colostomy, a certain amount of fiber in your diet is needed to add bulk to your stools and make them easy to pass. Mild constipation can be treated by

adjusting your diet in the following ways:

- Increase the amount of liquids you drink. Drink extra water, juice, tea, or coffee.
- Eat high-fiber foods, like bran cereals, fresh fruit (chew well), vegetables (raw and cooked), whole wheat breads, and whole grain cereals (such as oatmeal, Ralston, or wheat flakes).
- Some people find that coffee, chocolate, lemon juice, licorice, or prune juice will help constipation.

Exercise often helps, even if it is only a little extra walking.

## Diarrhea

The consistency of your stools is determined to a certain extent by the location of your stoma in your gastrointestinal (GI) tract. Normally, when the stoma is higher up in the GI tract, the stools tend to be looser. In some cases, a loose stool may be the result of eating certain foods. The following foods can cause loose stools:

- baked beans
- hot beverages
- broccoli
- chocolate
- very large meals
- heavily spiced foods
- beer
- soup
- licorice
- prune juice
- dried beans
- red wine

Any food that gave you loose stools before your ostomy may continue to do so.

Remember to test a small amount of a suspected food again in a few weeks to be sure it really does trouble you.

The following foods may help when you are experiencing diarrhea:

- applesauce
- peanut butter
- bananas
- cream of rice
- boiled milk
- tapioca
- rice
- weak tea

Loose stools can also result from emotional upset, traveling, and impure water (which can be a problem if you travel abroad). Diarrhea can also be caused by illnesses like the flu. If you are losing a lot of fluid through your ostomy because of the flu or other problems, be sure to drink plenty of liquids, such as tea, bouillon or broth, and ginger ale. If diarrhea continues for more than 24 hours, call your doctor.

### **A special note for ileostomy patients**

It is very easy to quickly lose large amounts of water, minerals, and vitamins through an ileostomy when diarrhea occurs. Losing too much fluid can lead to a condition called dehydration (dee-hi-DRAY-shun), which can be dangerous. Your fluid and mineral losses need to be replaced so that you do not become dehydrated and ill.

The following recipe is for a beverage that you can drink when you lose large amounts of fluid through your ileostomy. You can also drink Gatorade, which is available in most supermarkets.

#### **Beverage recipe**

- 1 teaspoon salt
- 4 teaspoons corn syrup
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 6-ounce can of frozen orange juice

Mix all the ingredients together and add enough water to make one quart.

### **Potassium and sodium**

These two minerals are lost daily with the fluids that leave your body through your ileostomy. They can be replaced by adding foods high in potassium and sodium to your daily diet. Talk with your doctor if you follow a diet that restricts potassium or sodium. He or she will advise you of any special instructions for your condition. Good dietary sources of potassium and sodium are listed below:

#### *Foods high in potassium*

- |                    |                  |
|--------------------|------------------|
| - milk             | - beef           |
| - chicken          | - duck           |
| - fish             | - lamb           |
| - pork             | - veal           |
| - turkey           | - green beans    |
| - lima beans       | - broccoli       |
| - brussels sprouts | - potatoes       |
| - peppers          | - spinach        |
| - tomatoes         | - tomato juice   |
| - V8 juice         | - apricot nectar |
| - apricots         | - avocado        |
| - bananas          | - cantaloupe     |
| - cherries         | - dates          |
| - figs             | - grapefruit     |
| - grapefruit juice | - white grapes   |
| - nectarines       | - oranges        |
| - orange juice     | - peaches        |
| - peach nectar     | - pineapple      |
| - plums            | - prunes         |
| - prune juice      | - rhubarb        |
| - strawberries     | - watermelon     |

***Foods high in sodium***

When used in cooking or at the table, salt is the most obvious source of dietary sodium. Other seasonings are also good sources of sodium. They include:

- meat tenderizers
- gravy flavorings
- worcestershire sauce
- monosodium glutamate (MSG)
- salts (such as celery, onion, or garlic)
- ketchup
- chili sauce
- soy sauce

Foods that have salt added during processing are also good sources of dietary sodium. They include:

- canned and dried soups
- sauces
- canned meat, fish, stews, and gravies
- crackers (and other snack foods)
- most canned and convenience foods
- pickles, relishes, olives, and other pickled foods (sweet or sour)

- salted popcorn
- pretzels
- TV dinners and frozen entrees
- vegetables marinated or prepared in brine
- cold cuts, including corned beef
- ham and bacon
- hot dogs
- peanut butter
- salad dressings
- sauerkraut
- sausage
- scrapple
- tomato juice
- tomato sauce
- V8 juice
- cheese (all types)

**Preventing diarrhea**

Eating foods that are low in fiber may help prevent irritation of your digestive tract, including diarrhea. Use these guidelines as a reference when selecting low-fiber foods:

**Fruit and fruit juices**

SELECT	AVOID
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- cooked or canned fruit in juice</li> <li>- applesauce</li> <li>- cherries</li> <li>- apricots</li> <li>- peaches</li> <li>- pears</li> <li>- ripe bananas</li> <li>- all fruit juices (prune juice may be limited for some patients)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- melons</li> <li>- canned fruits in heavy syrup</li> <li>- dates</li> <li>- berries</li> <li>- raisins</li> <li>- raw or coarse fruits</li> </ul>

**Soups**

SELECT	AVOID
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- bouillon</li> <li>- broth (may have noodles or rice added)</li> <li>- strained cream soups prepared with allowed vegetables and allotted milk</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- highly seasoned cream soups</li> <li>- regular vegetable soup</li> </ul>

**Eggs**

SELECT	AVOID
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- soft-cooked</li> <li>- hard-boiled</li> <li>- poached</li> <li>- scrambled</li> <li>- over easy</li> <li>- plain omelette</li> <li>- souffle</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- fried eggs</li> </ul>

**Meat, fish, poultry, cheese**

SELECT	AVOID
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- beef</li> <li>- ham</li> <li>- lamb</li> <li>- veal</li> <li>- lean fresh pork</li> <li>- bacon</li> <li>- fish</li> <li>- poultry</li> <li>- cheese</li> <li>- two eggs or 4 tablespoons of plain, smooth peanut butter may be used in place of 2 ounces of meat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- all fried meats, fish, and poultry</li> <li>- all highly seasoned meats, fish, poultry, cheese, and pork</li> <li>- all luncheon meats</li> <li>- sauce</li> </ul>

### Breads and cereals

SELECT	AVOID
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- refined white bread</li> <li>- refined or strained whole-grain hot cereal (such as Farina or strained oatmeal)</li> <li>- refined cold cereal (such as Rice Krispies)</li> <li>- macaroni and spaghetti (buttered or plain with white sauce)</li> <li>- strained sweet potatoes and white potatoes (mashed, creamed, scalloped, or baked with no skin)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- cereal</li> <li>- potatoes</li> <li>- Corn Flakes</li> <li>- white crackers</li> <li>- refined rice</li> <li>- bread</li> <li>- cereal products</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- whole-grain bread containing seeds and nuts</li> <li>- graham crackers</li> <li>- whole-grain cereal (such as Shredded Wheat or All-Bran)</li> </ul>

### Milk

SELECT	AVOID
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- milk</li> <li>- skim milk</li> <li>- buttermilk (used as a beverage or in cooking)</li> <li>- yogurt</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- all other milk products</li> </ul>

### Vegetables

SELECT	AVOID
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- asparagus</li> <li>- green or yellow beans</li> <li>- peas</li> <li>- spinach</li> <li>- cooked beets</li> <li>- carrots</li> <li>- squash</li> <li>- pumpkin</li> <li>- tomato juice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- dried beans</li> <li>- onions</li> <li>- broccoli</li> <li>- corn</li> <li>- turnips</li> <li>- legumes</li> <li>- peas</li> <li>- cabbage</li> <li>- rutabaga</li> <li>- peppers</li> <li>- sauerkraut</li> <li>- brussels sprouts</li> <li>- lima beans</li> <li>- all raw and coarse vegetables (except lettuce or parsley garnishes)</li> <li>- highly seasoned vegetable juice</li> </ul>

*continued*

**Dessert** (*use any allowed fruits*)

SELECT	AVOID
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- custard</li> <li>- cornstarch</li> <li>- rice or bread pudding</li> <li>- frozen gelatin desserts and fruit whips made with pureed fruits or juice</li> <li>- junket</li> <li>- tapioca</li> <li>- angel food cake</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- pastries</li> <li>- any food with nuts, raisins, or seeds</li> </ul>

**Fats**

SELECT	AVOID
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- butter</li> <li>- margarine</li> <li>- cream</li> <li>- salad oil</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- gravies</li> <li>- rich cream sauces</li> <li>- fried or fatty foods</li> </ul>

**Beverages**

SELECT	AVOID
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- coffee (regular and decaffeinated)</li> <li>- tea</li> <li>- carbonated beverages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- none</li> </ul>

**Miscellaneous**

SELECT	AVOID
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- salt</li> <li>- sugar</li> <li>- honey</li> <li>- clear sugar candies</li> <li>- mild chocolate (cocoa, milk, pudding)</li> <li>- vanilla flavoring</li> <li>- syrup</li> <li>- clear jelly</li> <li>- paprika</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- pepper and spices</li> <li>- rich spicy sauces</li> <li>- raisins and dates</li> <li>- snack foods (such as popcorn)</li> <li>- flavored crackers</li> <li>- jams</li> <li>- preserves</li> <li>- marmalade</li> </ul>

If these suggestions do not relieve episodes of irritation or diarrhea within a day or two, call your doctor.

## **Other general information**

### ***Special diets***

Your doctor may order a special diet for you for reasons other than your ostomy. For example, there are diets to help control high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease. Make sure you check with your dietitian about following these special diets.

### ***Red spots***

Some ostomy patients have mistakenly thought they were bleeding when they noticed red spots in their stools. Certain foods such as red peppers, pimientos, and beets may show up as red particles in your stools. These particles may be mistaken for blood. If you are unsure, call your doctor.

### ***Traveling***

If you travel to a foreign country, you should first check with your doctor, enterostomal therapist, or dietitian. You may encounter food and water that are impure, and you may need special advice on what to do to prevent problems.

### ***Fluids***

Drink more fluids in hot weather and when you exercise to help replace excess fluid loss, particularly if you have an ileostomy.

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