

Your Care at Home: Ileostomy Care

Narrator

If you've recently had an ileostomy, you probably have a lot of questions. It can be a big adjustment. But just learning more about how an ileostomy works and how to take care of it may help make it easier for you. My friend and I will help you.

An ileostomy is an opening to drain body waste from your small intestine into a pouch that you wear on your body. It's usually placed to the right of your belly button, and may be permanent or temporary. Your waste, or stool, is usually loose and liquid, and contains digestive juices that are very irritating to your skin. So you'll need to take extra special care to protect your skin around the opening, or stoma.

There are two main types of ileostomy pouches, one-piece and two-piece. Your doctor or nurse will help you decide what's right for you. Ileostomy pouches are usually drainable. An open, or drainable, pouch can be emptied and reused, but you'll still need to replace it. You'll have to dispose of the stool in your pouch when it is one-third full. You'll empty it into the toilet. It's best to empty your open pouch before its one-third full.

Hold the pouch over the toilet and remove the clip if it has one, but don't throw it away. Now, turn the tail of the pouch inside out, making a cuff, and empty the pouch by squeezing from top to bottom. With your finger wrapped in toilet paper, wipe from the outside to the inside making sure the outside of the pouch tail is clean. Turn the cuff back and reapply the clamp or Velcro-like closure to close it.

Remember, you'll need to replace your pouches as recommended by your doctor and nurse. You want to change the barrier at least every seven days. Closed pouches are replaced every day, usually after a bowel movement. Most people who wear closed pouches don't empty them before they remove them. However, if you prefer to empty the pouch in the toilet before you throw it away, you can. Emptied or not, double bag the pouch in two plastic bags and throw it out. Never flush the pouch, as it will stop up your toilet.

Now let's talk about how to attach a new ileostomy pouch. Your pouch may be one-piece, attaching to your body as a single unit. Or it might be a two-piece pouch with one adhesive piece, called a skin barrier, that attaches to the body and a second piece, the pouch, that fastens on to that. Before you start, choose the time of day when your ileostomy is least active. Then gather your supplies, including a wastebasket, two plastic bags and a new pouch or the skin barrier "flange." Cut or mold the flange if needed.

For a one-piece pouch, close the bottom of your new pouch before you apply it. Then cut or mold the skin barrier if it needs to be sized. Make sure you take off the protective film from the barrier before applying it. With your skin clean and dry, apply the pouch from the bottom up. Hold your hands over it for about 45 seconds for the barrier to mold to your skin. That's it!

Now let's look at how to put on a two-piece pouch. Make sure the bottom of your new pouch is closed before you apply it. Cut or mold the opening of your skin barrier, the piece of the pouch that fits around your stoma, to fit your stoma as you've been taught, or use a premeasured barrier. Then remove the protective film from the barrier and use your finger in the opening to soften it and keep it even. Then apply the skin barrier around your stoma running your finger all around the opening to make sure it's sealed. Snap the pouch onto the barrier starting from bottom to the top. Press your hand against the barrier for 45 seconds, to mold it to your skin. Make double sure your pouch is closed. Then snap the end of the pouch to make sure the two parts are secure.

With an ileostomy, you should call your doctor if you have:

- Abdominal pain, nausea, severe constipation or diarrhea
- A fever of 101° or higher
- Increased bleeding around the ileostomy opening, some streaks of blood are normal, but not more than that
- Also call if your skin becomes irritated

You probably have a lot of questions about living with an ileostomy. Before you leave the hospital, ask for a referral to a home health agency to help with the adjustment. Most insurance companies should cover a visit or two.

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