
Colostomy: Managing Your Nutrition

You don't have to eat a special diet just because you've had a colostomy. Most foods, chewed well and eaten slowly, won't give you problems—unless they did before. But you may need to be more aware of foods that cause gas or odor and foods that make your stool too runny or too hard.



Choosing foods

Learning which foods cause gas or odor, or make your stool runny or hard, takes a little time. You may want to add foods back to your diet one at a time:

- Eat only small amounts at first to see how your body reacts.
- If a food causes a problem, wait and try it again in a few weeks.

Once your system adjusts to having a stoma, you may find the food doesn't give you trouble anymore.

Causes of gas and odor

Some gas is normal, but constant gas is not. Neither is constant odor from stool. What causes gas or odor can differ from person to person. Gas is often caused by swallowing air. To prevent this, eat slowly. Chew each bite well. Sip fluids, and don't use a straw.

Some foods tend to cause excess gas or odor. If gas or odor is a problem, you may want to eat less of certain foods.

Foods that can cause gas include:

- Beer and other carbonated beverages.
- Broccoli.
- Brussels sprouts.
- Cabbage.
- Cauliflower.
- Corn.
- Cucumbers.
- Dried beans.
- Milk and other dairy products with lactose.
- Mushrooms.
- Nuts.
- Onions.
- Peas.
- Sodas.
- Spicy foods.

Foods that can cause odor include:

- Asparagus.
- Broccoli.
- Brussels sprouts.
- Cabbage.
- Cheese.
- Eggs.
- Fish.
- Garlic.
- Horseradish.
- Spices, such as coriander, cumin, dill, and fennel.

Causes of diarrhea

Stool that's more runny than normal (diarrhea) can be a sign of an illness, such as the flu. Some foods and medicines can also cause runny stool:

- If your stool is more runny than normal, drink plenty of fluids. This helps replace lost fluids and prevent dehydration.
- Stay away from foods that can make the stool loose, such as raw fruits and vegetables, garlic, onions, alcohol, spicy foods, and foods that are high in fat or sugar.
- Lactose-containing dairy products can cause gas and loose stool in some people. Try lactose-free dairy products. They are widely available.
- Check with your health care provider before you take any medicines for diarrhea.
- Don't irrigate while you have diarrhea.

Preventing constipation

Your stool can sometimes be too hard (constipation). Hard stool is often caused by not eating enough fiber or not drinking enough fluids. Stress and some medicines can also cause hard stool:

- If your stool is hard, eat more high-fiber foods, such as fruits, vegetables, and whole-grain breads and cereals.
- Drink at least 8 to 12 cups (2 to 3 quarts) of water or juice each day, or as directed by our health care team. Fluids can be hot or cold.
- Check with your provider before using laxatives or stool softeners.

When to call your doctor

Contact your health care provider right away if:

- You have bloating, cramping, nausea, pain, or vomiting.
- You have a change in your normal bowel habits, such as little or no stool or no passage of gas.
- Your stool is loose or more runny than normal for more than 5 to 6 hours.
- Your stool is black or bloody. **Call 911** if there is a lot of blood coming from your stoma.
- The stoma changes size, oozes, or bleeds.