

# Life with an Ostomy



**Douglas D. Dykman,  
M.D., F.A.C.G.**

Sometimes, due to illness, part of the intestines can become so damaged that it needs to be removed. This may require that an alternate means of eliminating bowel contents needs to be created, frequently referred to as Colostomy or Ileostomy. This is an artificial opening on the abdominal wall which drains into a plastic appliance. An Ostomy may be recommended when a patient has Crohns Disease, cancer of the colon or rectum, ulcerative colitis, severe colonic infection such as diverticulitis, or birth malformations. The Ostomy may be permanent or may be a temporary treatment to allow portions of the digestive tract to heal. Whatever the reason for Ostomy, it usually results in better quality of life.

After surgery, the recovery period is important. When a patient's body changes physically and its processes become different, emotional challenges can be great. He or she must adjust to eliminating a new way. The patient will learn self care after the surgery and will usually have a specialized Enterostomal Therapy Nurse available for support and instruction. There are many different types of appliances and deodorized bags. The patient, surgeon and Enterostomal Therapist decide which type of colostomy bag is most comfortable and works best for them.

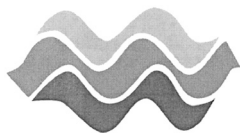
It may seem odd to hear an Ostomy would equate to better quality of life,

but for those who suffer daily with pain and discomfort, or incontinence, an Ostomy is often a relief. Once fully healed a patient can look forward to doing everything with their family that they used to do before. Thousand upon thousands of Ostomy patients lead active, healthy lives and often times can become involved in activities that they were limited from prior to the surgery. Exercise, running, biking and even swimming is usually permitted. Sexual activity can be resumed once healed. Sometimes impotence can be an issue if nerve damage occurred as part of the surgery to remove the disease. If so, there are surgical techniques available to help and numerous helpful medications. A cotton cover is available to wear to hide the appliance and prevent chafing. Having an Ostomy does not affect your ability to become pregnant. In most cases, the delivery should be no more complicated than for a woman who has not had an Ostomy.

An Ostomy allows an individual freedom. Prior to surgery many cannot be away from a bathroom long enough to go to their children's sporting events, the movies or the park. Vacationing may be impossible. After the surgery, patients no longer feel chained to the commode, because they can choose when and where to empty their Ostomy bag.

The decision to create an Ostomy may be done emergently by a surgeon during an operation, or electively between the surgeon and patient prior to embarking upon a surgical treatment of a specific condition. Once healed up from the acute illness, most patients are pleased with the results and improved lifestyle. When safe and possible, all efforts are made to reverse the Ostomy and allow passage of stool thru the anus.

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**Christopher F. Schultz, M.D.**



Anne Arundel Gastroenterology Associates, P.A.