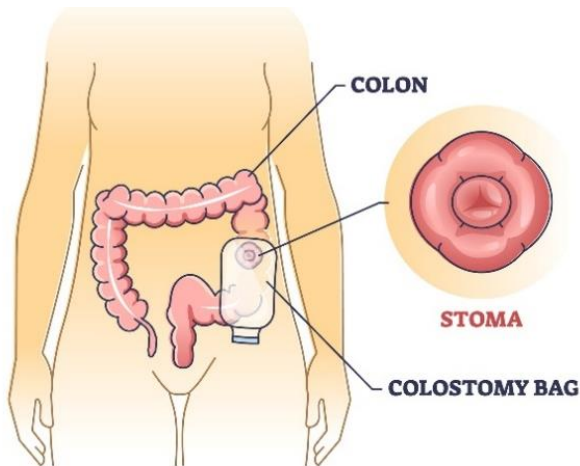


# Eating Well after Colostomy Surgery

## What is a colostomy?

A **colostomy** is when the colon (large intestine) is moved to an opening on the skin of the abdomen. A colostomy may be in place for a short time or be lifelong.

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



The colon moves digested food and absorbs the water and nutrients from it. It then passes this poop to the rectum.

When you have a colostomy, poop does not go to the rectum. Instead, it moves into a **colostomy pouch or bag** as it leaves the body.

**Output** is the amount of poop in the colostomy pouch or bag.

## Importance of nutrition

It is important to get enough nutrition daily to help:

- Heal and recover
- Fight infection
- Maintain muscle strength
- Avoid muscle loss

With time, you will be able to enjoy the foods and fluids you did before getting a colostomy.

## First 2–4 weeks after surgery

Your body needs time to heal right after getting a colostomy.

Gradually try different foods and fluids while your stoma heals.

- Spread meals and snacks throughout the day to help your body manage your poop.
- Soft foods that are lower in fibre and break down more easily. These may be easier for your body to digest and pass through your stoma after surgery.
  - Choose cooked grains, like rice, quinoa, and barley.
  - Vegetables and fruits are good to eat. Try them without skins or seeds while you heal. Cook vegetables and chew them well to help break them down.
  - Peel and cook root vegetables like potatoes, sweet potatoes, celery root (celeriac), and beets to make them easier to digest.
- Bland foods may be easier to digest than spicy foods if you don't usually eat spicy foods.

## After 4 weeks with a colostomy

Continue adding foods and fluids with the goal of eating the way you did before surgery.

You will notice that some foods and fluids may change the consistency or amount of poop your colostomy puts out.

## Stoma blockage

While your colostomy heals, some foods can increase the risk of a blockage. These foods may include:

- Higher in fibre foods:
  - Corn, popcorn
  - Bok choy, cabbage, celery, Chinese broccoli, napa cabbage
  - Coconut, grapes, grapefruit, mango, oranges
  - Dried fruits such as raisins and prunes
  - Whole grains and whole grain bread products
  - Nuts and seeds
- Meats with casings (such as sausage)

**These foods can still be eaten.** Chew all foods well and remove seeds, peels, and casings while your colostomy heals. Once it's healed, eat them as you would usually.

Signs of a blocked stoma:

- Constipation or low colostomy output
- Painful stomach-ache or cramps
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Peeing less
- Lower or no appetite



### Blockages can be serious.

Remind children to chew foods well. You can also cut their food in smaller pieces for them.

**Contact your surgeon or healthcare team right away if you suspect a blockage.**

## Monitor

While your body heals, gradually try other foods. Fibre is okay to eat after surgery. Slowly add higher fibre foods daily.

Monitor how you feel after eating or drinking different food or fluids. See if you notice any change in output or poop.

## Get enough nutrition

After surgery, your body needs extra nutrition to heal. Eat a variety of foods daily that you enjoy.

### Eat protein foods

Protein foods can help you heal and recover.

To get enough, eat protein foods at every meal and snack.

Check out [ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts](https://www.ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts) for protein-rich food ideas.

## Nutrition supplements and protein powder

Eating well and staying hydrated is important.

A nutrition supplement food or drink may help when you are unable to meet your nutrient needs through food alone. They can give you extra calories, protein, vitamins, and minerals.

Nutrition supplements come in many forms: drinks, bars, puddings, and powders.

Store-brand nutrition supplements and protein powders usually have as much nutrition as brand name products but may cost less.



## Vitamin, mineral, or herbal supplements

Some supplements may cause higher output or cause odour.

Check with your healthcare team **before** taking any vitamin, mineral, or herbal supplement.

## Drink fluids every day

Drinking enough fluid helps your colostomy to work properly and helps you avoid being dehydrated.

Age (Years)	Recommended amount of fluid to drink daily	
	Females	Males
2–3	4 cups (900 mL)	
4–8	5 cups (1.2 L)	
9–13	6 cups (1.6 L)	7 cups (1.8 L)
14–18	7 cups (1.8 L)	10 cups (2.6 L)
18–64	9–12 cups (2.25–3 L)	
65+	6–8 cups (1.5–2 L)	

You may need more fluids daily. Drink more fluids after being active or when it's hot outside.

Fluid includes water and other liquids such as milk, fortified soy beverage, tea, and broth.

Try to drink enough each day to prevent dehydration. Dehydration is when your body doesn't get enough fluid.

### Watch for signs of dehydration

These include:

- Dry mouth
- Dry skin
- Headaches
- Feeling thirsty
- Feeling dizzy
- Low blood pressure
- Nausea
- Muscle cramping
- Peeing less or dark pee
- Weight loss

If you think you may be dehydrated, try to drink more (water or oral rehydration solution), and monitor your symptoms. If they do not improve, contact your healthcare team.

Check out [ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts](https://www.ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts) for oral rehydration solution recipes you can make at home.

## Possible side effects

Tips to help manage possible side-effects while your colostomy heals.

### Low appetite

Your appetite may be less than before surgery. This is okay.

- If you feel too full after meals, eat smaller amounts more often. Try 5–6 smaller meals rather than 3 regular meals.
- Eat small amounts of food during the day and when you feel more like eating.

Sip on fluids during the day even when not thirsty. See “**Drink fluids every day**” for details.

### Gas or odour

Some people notice that certain foods, fluids, or actions cause gas or odour. These may cause discomfort but are usually not a concern. These foods and fluids may include:

- Broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, garlic, onion
- Chewing gum
- Eggs
- Fizzy drinks (soda/pop, sparkling water)
- Spicy foods
- Strong cheese (blue cheese, 'old' cheese, Roquefort)
- Using drinking straws

For adults only:

- Alcohol (beer, ciders, wine, spirits)
- Coffee

Monitor how your body responds (gas, bloating, or change in colostomy output). If these food or fluids don't bother you, continue to eat them.



## Constipation

Constipation is when it's hard to poop. Your poop may be:

- Hard and dry
- Difficult or painful to pass
- Happening less than 3 times per week

Some people poop more often than others. Pooping less often doesn't mean you are constipated. You may not be constipated if:

- You follow a regular pattern
- Your stoma is soft
- Your poop is soft and easy to pass

Constipation is different from a blocked stoma.

## What causes constipation?

Possible causes of constipation include:

- Low fibre diet
- Not drinking enough fluid
- Not getting enough activity each day
- Stress or depression
- Hormones in pregnancy and menopause
- Certain medical conditions
- Side effects from some medications or supplements

## If you become constipated

It is best to prevent constipation. If you do become constipated, try to:

- Drink more fluids.
- Eat more fibre-rich foods like fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
- Do light exercise, like walking.



Talk to your healthcare team **before** using any laxatives.

## Diarrhea

Once your colostomy has healed, diarrhea is rare. Diarrhea is when poop is liquid, smells bad, and happens more often than usual.

If you have diarrhea 3 or more times in a row, there is risk of dehydration. Contact your healthcare team.

## Foods that may slow colostomy output

To thicken your poop (and slow your colostomy output), the following food and drink may be able to help:

- Applesauce
- Banana
- Boiled milk
- Bread, bagel, pasta
- Hard cheese
- Marshmallows
- Oatmeal
- Pretzels
- Smooth peanut butter
- Tapioca
- Yogurt

## More information

Visit Ostomy Canada Society

- Resuming a Normal Diet after Ostomy Surgery: [ostomycanada.ca/diet/](https://ostomycanada.ca/diet/)

## For more support



- Talk to your healthcare team.
- Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete a [self-referral form](#) on [ahs.ca/811](https://ahs.ca/811).
- Visit [ahs.ca/Nutrition](https://ahs.ca/Nutrition).
- Call, text, or chat with 211 Alberta ([ab.211.ca/](https://ab.211.ca/)) to find out about financial benefits, programs, and services.