



Real-life Tips From People With An Ostomy

From People With An Ostomy

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction and disclaimer.....	3
Swimming and showering.....	3
Anti-odour.....	4
Traveling.....	4
Itchy skin	5
Red and sore skin.....	6
Blow outs	6
Remedies to get old and new stool stains out.....	7
Constipation.....	7
Blockage.....	8
Pancaking.....	8
Improve wafer adhesion	9
Adapt rings, Eakin rings or strip paste	9
How to thicken stool output.....	9
Cover your pouch in intimate moments	9

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INTRODUCTION AND DISCLAIMER

This document contains a collection of practical ideas and suggestions posted and discussed by people with an ostomy on MeetAnOstoMate.org. The following information should not be construed as specific instructions for individual ostomates or random readers.

None of the information, opinions, suggestions or advice, presented here, substitute for professional medical care or personal attention by a qualified practitioner and under no circumstances may it be relied upon as such. Always check with your doctor or your ET/Stoma Nurse if you have any questions or concerns about your condition, if you are about to start a new program of treatment or try a new product or a drug. Consult your doctor regarding the applicability of any information found in this document in regards to your symptoms or medical condition.

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SWIMMING AND SHOWERING

Most people with an ostomy have no problem swimming or showering with the bag on. The following are some practical tips:

- Try to avoid eating anything a few hours before you expect to swim. This will minimize your stoma output. Empty your pouch before swimming.
- Do not put a new appliance on (flange if you use a two-piece system) before swimming, since it may be faulty. It is better to stay with the one you have on and you know it works well. For additional security (not necessary) you may put waterproof tape along all 4 sides of your flange.
- Dry your appliance with a towel after the swim/shower.

From People With An Ostomy

- If you irrigate or if you know that you will have very little output you can use a mini-pouch or stoma cap. It is better to use a two-piece system since you can leave the flange on and simply change the pouch to a mini.
- When showering, you can fold the pouch up and put GLAD's Press 'n Seal® over and around it. It will help to keep the water out.

ANTI-ODOUR

The following are some practical ideas for keeping the odor out:

- Add one teaspoon of baking soda in the pouch each time you change or empty. Some people claim that this removes 90% of the odor. It is easy and affordable.
- Add a few drops of ordinary peppermint oil to your pouch each time you change or empty.
- Add a few drops of eucalyptus oil to your pouch each time you change or empty.
- Add a few drops of 3% hydrogen peroxide solution to your pouch each time you change or empty.
- One or two Chlorophyll tablets or Chlorophyll liquid taken with each meal may help, as Chlorophyll is a great deodorizer. They may be found at any health food store and on the Internet and are usually inexpensive.
- Add two or three Tic Tacs to your pouch each time you change or empty. This can reduce the odor significantly. Try different types of Tic Tacs to find the best results.
- You can also try adding a teaspoon of mouthwash to your pouch.

TRAVELING

Here are some practical tips for travelers:

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- Take two sets of flanges and pouches. -. Changes in food and activity levels, as well as disruptions in your routine, can throw your ostomy off.
- Wear clothing that does not press on your stoma.
- Carry plenty of ostomy supplies in your carry-on bag, as lost or delayed luggage can cause serious problems. If possible, have all your supplies with you on the plane.
- If you are using cut-to-fit flanges, make sure you cut them before you get on the flight.
- Do not eat anything a few hours before the flight in order to minimize stoma output.
- If you have to go through security screeners, make sure to advise the security personal of your ostomy. Although most of them should be properly trained, letting them know beforehand may avoid some uncomfortable situations. For extra security, consider obtaining a note from your doctor.
- For longer flights (or bus or train rides) you may want to consider a high output bag. This will save you some trips to the washroom and will also last longer in case of no washroom availability for prolonged periods of time.

ITCHY SKIN

If you experience any itching under and around the wafer you can try some of the following:

- Apply a small amount of Calamine lotion to the area where the wafer sticks to the skin. Calamine contains an anti-itching agent. You can use a hair dryer set on low for a few seconds to make sure your skin is dry before putting on the wafer.
- Ask your nurse or doctor about Zonalon cream. It is supposed to relieve moderate itching caused by certain skin conditions. This is a prescription medication.
- Ask your nurse or doctor about Cortizone-10[®]. It is an anti-itch product that you can apply to your skin.
- Antifungal powders relieve itch caused by fungal infections. Check with your nurse or doctor.
- Some oral allergy medications may also help with the itch. Check with your nurse or doctor.
- Apply a spare wafer on the opposite side of your stoma to see if the skin there will start to itch too. If you get an itch there too, you might have an allergic reaction to the adhesive.

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- Try rinsing the skin around your stoma using cool water with about 1 tsp. of baking soda in it. You might find that helps with the itching. Also be sure to use skin barrier prior to putting on the new flange. This will help protect your skin.
- Never scratch the skin under the barrier as it may cause infections and sores.

RED AND SORE SKIN

- Many of the leading ostomy manufacturers offer powders, creams, wipes etc. that can be used to treat irritated skin before applying the wafer. Check with your nurse or doctor.
- If your nurse or doctor suspects psoriasis ask them for Clobex[®] spray. It works by reducing skin inflammation (e.g. redness, swelling, itching or irritation). It has worked well for many patients.
- You can use the Aloe Vera plant to treat the affected skin (not the juice or the lotion bought in the store, but the plant itself). Snip off about two inches of the plant and then slice it down the middle with a razor blade or a paring knife. The inside of the plant is watery and a bit gooey. Make sure the skin around your stoma is clean, dry, and completely free of any soap residue. Gently rub the opened plant over your skin to allow the juice from the plant to coat the affected area. Allow it to dry completely. Do not wash it off your skin, just re-apply your wafer. Use daily or as often as needed. Talk to your nurse or doctor before doing so.
- You may also try wiping the affected area with baby wipes containing Aloe.

BLOW OUTS

Blow outs refer to those situations when stool or gas accumulation causes the pouch to either break or separate from the flange, causing a leak. This can happen to anyone and at any time - overnight, when you go out, in the car etc. The following are some tips to prevent or minimize the risk of blow outs.

- Try to eat little or, if possible, nothing for about 4 to 5 hours before bed time. Empty your bag before going to bed.
- Avoid gas-producing foods before bed time or before going out. Most foods that contain carbohydrates, lactose, starches and fiber can cause gas.

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- Change your appliances regularly. During the night, you can train yourself to wake up (or use a gentle alarm clock) to make sure that everything is alright.
- Use a towel, sheet protector or mattress cover under you to protect the bed and sheets in case of an accident.
- Some find that eating a few marshmallows before going to bed or going out helps with minimizing and solidifying the output.
- If you go out, make sure your pants or belt are not too tight on the bag.

REMEDIES TO GET OLD AND NEW STOOL STAINS OUT

- Add soda crystals (in crystal or liquid form) to your laundry. This is a cheap way to handle stains. You can purchase soda crystals in household stores.
- Try pouring AVON® bubble bath liquid onto the affected spots, rub in and wash with cold water.
- Spray or rub in OxiClean® onto the stained area and then wash with cold water.
- Try using Greased Lightning®. You can buy it at Home Depot. Some say it works miracles.
- Another product you can try is LA's Totally Awesome® all purpose concentrated cleaner. You can purchase it at many stores, including 1 Dollar stores. Spray it onto the affected area and wash with cold water.

CONSTIPATION

- Drink some “Ballerina tea” to aid your bowel movement. A good and cheap place to find it is at an Asian market.
- Taking painkillers containing codeine may cause your stool to become harder (constipated). If you experience problems, check with your nurse or doctor.

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BLOCKAGE

- Remember to always chew your food properly swallowing. Drink plenty of liquids.
- The shorter your bowels the higher the chance for blockage. For example, you stand a greater chance to experience problems if you have an ileostomy compared to colostomy.
- Be careful when eating oranges (or any other citrus fruit), since the membranes can cause severe blockage. Instead, you can try canned fruit where the membranes are much softer. Avoid fresh raw pineapple – it may cause severe blockage.
- About oranges: you can try slicing the orange into thin slices (leave the peel on) - then cut the slice into half-moons to eat. This breaks up the membranes very well. This works for any citrus fruit.
- Fresh veggies (onions, lettuce, celery, carrots, tomato etc.) nuts, mushrooms and other hard-to-digest foods may cause blockage as well. It is not the same for everyone. You should carefully try and see how it works for you. Most blockages are caused by food that was not processed properly by your digestive system. Make sure to chew the food well or to cook it till soft.
- If you experience blockage you can drink some mineral oil. It makes things slide out. You should also drink plenty of liquids.
- In case of blockage you can also try massaging the abdomen and the area around the stoma as this might increase the pressure behind the blockage and help it to “pop out.” Most food blockages occur just below the stoma.
- If nothing works, call your doctor or WOC/ET Nurse and report what is happening. If you cannot reach them and there is no output from the stoma for over a day, go to the emergency room immediately.

PANCAKING

The reference of ‘pancaking’ is when stool gathers in the upper part of the pouch and stays there as opposed to going down to the bottom.

- Make sure you have air in the bag. If you do not have enough air it acts like vacuum and your stool will sit where it comes out and will not drop down to the bottom of the bag.

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- You can also try adding a few drops of baby oil (or cooking oil) to the inside of the pouch and rub it in the inside walls to help the stool to slide down.

IMPROVE WAFER ADHESION

- Using antiperspirant just above the wafer may prevent sweat from interfering with the wafer's adhesive.
- When changing your appliance, use a hair dryer set on low and directed at the wafer to help the adhesion. Some people with an ostomy achieve 5 to 7 days wear time.

ADAPT RINGS, EAKIN RINGS OR STRIP PASTE

- You have to stretch the ring or the strip paste before application. If you use a hair dryer on low for about thirty seconds to heat up the ring, it becomes much easier to mould around the stoma.

HOW TO THIKEN STOOL OUTPUT

- If you have an ileostomy and are concerned about leakage while changing your appliances, try eating a handful of marshmallows about 15 minutes before the procedure. They tend to thicken the output. Do not overdo it though, since it can cause blockage.
- To "thicken- up" the output, one can also eat peanut butter, crackers, bananas or even Jelly Babies (or any sweeties with gelatin).

COVER YOUR POUCH IN INTIMATE MOMENTS

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You can try using Bella Bands to cover and keep your appliances in place. They were designed for pregnant women, but can work great during sex, swimming or any other activity. Use them under your clothes in place of an ostomy belt.