Colostomy

A colostomy is a surgically made opening (*stoma*) in the belly (*abdominal wall*) through which digested food passes. The large bowel (*colon*) is connected to the abdominal wall to make the stoma. A bowel movement passes through this stoma and not the rectum (*anus*).

- A **temporary** colostomy may be needed to give a portion of the bowel a chance to rest and heal. When the bowel has healed, the colostomy may be reversed and bowel functions will be returned to normal. This is done in another surgery in which both ends of the colon are put back together.
- A **permanent** colostomy may be needed when a disease affects the end part of the colon or rectum. If the rectum or lower colon are removed completely, there is no way to have normal bowel movements. All future bowel movements will be made through the colostomy.

REASONS FOR A COLOSTOMY

- Cancer.
- Diverticulitis.
- Anus with no opening (*imperforate*) at birth.
- Hirschsprung's disease.
- Injury (*trauma*).

CARE OF A COLOSTOMY

A pouch is usually worn over the stoma. Pouches are odor free and come in different styles and kinds to fit your lifestyle. The pouch is simply a plastic bag which collects the waste that comes from the bowel. Waste comes through the stoma and into the bag. Some people may learn ways to control the timing of bowel movements and do not need to use a pouch all the time.

LIVING WITH A COLOSTOMY

- **Work:** Unless a job requires lifting more than 10 pounds/4.5 kilograms, a colostomy should not interfere with work. Success in a variety of careers is possible.
- **Sex and social life:** Physically, a colostomy usually does not affect sexual function. If there is a problem, it is almost always related to the removal of the rectum. A colostomy should not interfere with normal sexual activity or pregnancy. It does not prevent you from dating, getting married, or having children.
- **Clothing:** Usually you are able to wear the same clothing as before surgery, including swimwear.
- **Sports and activities:** With a securely attached pouch, you may swim, camp out, play baseball, and participate in practically all types of sports. Caution is advised in heavy contact sports. Travel is not restricted in any way. Bathing and showering may be done with or without the pouch in place.
- **Diet:** Usually there are no dietary restrictions and foods can be enjoyed as before.
- **Supplies:** Related supplies are available at drug stores, medical supply stores, and through the mail.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE:

Specially trained nurses called Wound, Ostomy and Continence Nurses (WOCN) are available for consultation in most major medical centers. Visit the United Ostomy Associations of America at: www.ostomy.org.

Most of this information courtesy of the United Ostomy Associations of America.

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