



# CARE INSTRUCTIONS

KAISER PERMANENTE

## Colostomy: What to Expect at Home

### Your Recovery

You can expect to feel better and stronger each day, but you may get tired quickly at first. Your belly may be sore, and you will probably need pain medicine for a week or two. Your stoma will be swollen at first. This is normal.

You may have very loose stools in your colostomy bag for a while. In time your stools may become firmer, but they will be less solid than before your surgery. You may also have a lot of gas pass into your colostomy bag in the weeks after surgery. This will decrease as you heal.

How quickly you get better depends, in part, on whether you had a laparoscopic or open surgery. But you will probably need at least 6 weeks to get back to your normal routine.

This care sheet gives you a general idea about how long it will take for you to recover. But each person recovers at a different pace. Follow the steps below to get better as quickly as possible.

### How can you care for yourself at home?

#### Activity

- Rest when you feel tired. Getting enough sleep will help you recover.
- Try to walk each day. Start by walking a little more than you did the day before. Bit by bit, increase the amount you walk. Walking boosts blood flow and helps prevent pneumonia and constipation.
- Avoid strenuous activities, such as biking, jogging, weight lifting, or aerobic exercise, until your doctor says it is okay.
- For at least 6 weeks, avoid lifting anything that would make you strain. This may include heavy grocery bags and milk containers, a heavy briefcase or backpack, cat litter or dog food bags, a child, or a vacuum cleaner.

## Colostomy: What to Expect at Home (page 2)

- You may drive when you are no longer taking pain medicine and can quickly move your foot from the gas pedal to the brake. You must also be able to sit comfortably for a long period of time, even if you do not plan to go far. You might get caught in traffic.
- You will probably need to take 6 weeks off from work. It depends on the type of work you do and how you feel.
- You can take a bath or shower as usual. You can bathe with your colostomy bag on or off.
- Your doctor will tell you when you can have sex again.

### Diet

- You may need to follow a low-fiber diet for the first few weeks after your surgery.
- Drink plenty of fluids to avoid becoming dehydrated.

### Medicines

- Take pain medicines exactly as directed.
  - If the doctor gave you a prescription medicine for pain, take it as prescribed.
  - If you are not taking a prescription pain medicine, take an over-the-counter medicine such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), or naproxen (Aleve). Read and follow all instructions on the label.
  - Do not take two or more pain medicines at the same time unless the doctor told you to. Many pain medicines have acetaminophen, which is Tylenol. Too much acetaminophen (Tylenol) can be harmful.
- If your doctor prescribed antibiotics, take them as directed. Do not stop taking them just because you feel better. You need to take the full course of antibiotics.
- If you think your pain medicine is making you sick to your stomach:
  - Take your medicine after meals (unless your doctor has told you not to).
  - Ask your doctor for a different pain medicine.

### Incision care

- If you have strips of tape on the cut (incision) the doctor made, leave the tape on for a week or until it falls off.

## Colostomy: What to Expect at Home (page 3)

- Wash the area daily with warm, soapy water and pat it dry. Other cleaning products, such as hydrogen peroxide, can make the wound heal more slowly. You may cover the area with a gauze bandage if it weeps or rubs against clothing. Change the bandage every day.
- Keep the area clean and dry.

### Other instructions

- Keep the area around your stoma clean and dry.
- Follow all instructions from your doctor or ostomy nurse.
- Empty and replace your colostomy bag as often as directed by your doctor or ostomy nurse.

**Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety.** Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

### When should you call for help?

**Call 911** anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You pass out (lose consciousness).
- You have sudden chest pain and shortness of breath, or you cough up blood.
- You have severe belly pain.

**Call your doctor now** or seek immediate medical care if:

- You have pain that does not get better after you take your pain medicine.
- You have signs of infection, such as:
  - Increased pain, swelling, warmth, or redness.
  - Red streaks leading from the stoma.
  - Pus draining from the stoma.
  - Swollen lymph nodes in your neck, armpits, or groin.
  - A fever.
- You have little or no waste going into your colostomy bag.

## Colostomy: What to Expect at Home (page 4)

- Your stoma turns dark purple, black, or green.
- Your stoma bleeds.
- Your stoma pulls inward, or the edges separate from the skin.
- Your stoma bulges out into the colostomy bag.
- You have a bulge in the skin around the stoma.
- You have severe diarrhea that smells very bad.
- You have belly pain or cramping.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if you have any problems.

### Where can you learn more?

Go to <http://www.kp.org>

Enter W996 in the search box to learn more about "**Colostomy: What to Expect at Home**".

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