



Living with an Ostomy:  
Travel



Ostomy Care  
*Healthy skin. Positive outcomes.*



Before your ostomy surgery, your life may have included travelling. This booklet can help you take the steps to enjoy a worry-free trip. The key is planning. If you plan and organise ahead of time, you can be sure you are prepared for the new situations you will encounter.



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*A glossary is included at the back of this booklet to help with some terms with which you may not be familiar.*

As you read and take note of the information and tips included here, you can anticipate travelling to a country you've always dreamed of, and resuming your regular travel plans near and far.



## Getting Prepared to Travel

There is no reason why having a stoma should stop you from travelling anywhere in the world.

Many people with a stoma, particularly soon after the operation, can experience stress at the prospect of even the shortest journey. For example, they worry about not having access to a clean place to change a pouch, running out of or misplacing pouches or sleeping in an unfamiliar bedroom.

The following are general guidelines for things to consider before starting to travel. Of course, your requirements are specific to your situation and will depend on your unique preferences.

# General travel guidelines

It is only natural to feel apprehensive about travelling for the first time after your operation. You might want to start with short trips away from home to build up your confidence. Once reassured that your pouching system stays secure during normal day-to-day activities, you can start to venture farther.

A few days, or even weeks before departure, prepare a checklist of things to take with you. Keep track of your daily routine of pouch changes to remind yourself exactly what you need and use — pouches, skin barriers, pouching accessories, disposal bags and so on. Don't forget to take along different pouch lengths — perhaps a smaller one for sports activities or a bigger pouch for longer periods when pouch changes may be delayed.

Count the number of pouch changes you normally need to make, then double that number to make sure you have plenty of supplies and pouches on hand. That way, you will be ready for the unexpected — a delay in returning home, lost pouches, or changes in climate and environment that call for more pouch changes than usual.

In the event that you do need additional supplies while travelling, most manufacturers have products available around the world. Before you leave home, check to see where you can purchase new supplies in the areas where you plan to travel.

Your local ostomy association can also give you contacts of suppliers and manufacturers abroad.

## TIP

Calculate how many pouches you would normally need, then double that number to ensure you're prepared while on the go.

## Travel documents

When travelling abroad, you will naturally make sure that you have important papers such as a passport, tickets, visas, etc.

Other documents may also come in handy. A Travel Certificate can be downloaded from the Hollister Learning Centre website ([www.hollister.com.au/ostomylearningcentre](http://www.hollister.com.au/ostomylearningcentre)) that will help explain what your pouches, skin barriers, and medications are for, to help avoid extra questions at customs and/or security check points. The certificates are available in a variety of languages, which may be helpful should more supplies be required or medical recommendations needed while travelling abroad. It's also a good idea to have a letter from your healthcare professional explaining your medical condition.

You may also choose to purchase travel insurance to cover loss of luggage or money as well as cancellations.



Carefully check the insurance policy for guidelines around age limits or pre-existing medical conditions. If you are in doubt about whether you are fully covered, check with your insurance or travel agent.

Before you leave, find out how to obtain medical aid abroad and have emergency contacts available.

## **Last-minute arrangements**

You may be tempted to reduce the flow from your stoma while travelling by changing your regular eating or drinking routine. However, it is generally not recommended to vary your eating and drinking habits.

Some people find that changing their skin barrier and pouch before departure gives confidence and maximum security from the possibility of leaks.

# Air and road travel

Here are a few tips to make sure you are comfortable and prepared when you fly or take a trip by car, plane, or train.

## **Weight limits**

If you are travelling by air with a lot of supplies, check with the airline and travel authorities for the luggage weight allowance. Some airlines may offer special allowances for medical supplies.

## **Forbidden items**

Remember that International Air Transport Association (IATA) regulations forbid dangerous items on board. For example, ether, methylated spirits, or flammable aerosol adhesives and removers are not allowed because of a fire hazard. Scissors may not be allowed, so check with your airline or pre-cut your barriers before travelling.

## **Pre-boarding security checks**

Your carry-on luggage will be inspected at the security baggage check before boarding the aircraft. If you have any medications with you, have your healthcare professional prepare a card explaining that they are medical supplies. Some countries do not allow certain medications, such as codeine, to cross their borders.

You may be searched before boarding the aircraft, so be prepared to explain about your stoma. Travel cards for this are available from your local ostomy association.

## **Using airplane toilets**

During a long flight, there are times when many people want to use the toilet, perhaps after a meal. Keep your eyes open for a chance to use the toilet when most people are in their seats. You may want to request a seat that has easy access to the toilet.

## **Car travel**

Your car seat belt should sit across your hip bone and pelvis, not your abdomen and stoma. If you want to give your stoma extra protection from the strap, car accessory shops carry products that make seat belts more comfortable. An extension bracket can be fitted to lower the angle at which the belt crosses the body.

# Special considerations for your stoma type

Depending on the type of surgery you have had, there may be additional ways to make sure you are comfortable and prepared.

## **If you have an ileostomy**

In hot climates, dehydration can be a problem. It is important to drink plenty of fluids to remain well hydrated.

## **If you have a colostomy**

A change in cabin pressure on a plane or change in diet can create gas for anyone. But it can be a particular problem for people with a colostomy. Avoid obvious things such as carbonated drinks, eating too quickly, foods that you know cause gas, or anything that causes you to swallow air.

You can also use a pouch with a filter, which has a small vent that slowly deodorises gas, absorbs odour and releases the gas from the pouch.

## **If you have a urostomy**

If you will be in a hot climate, be sure to drink plenty of fluids to maintain your usual urine production so you are always flushing out your system.

Carefully maintain skin care around the stoma, especially in warm weather. If you begin to feel ill, do not wait to see your healthcare professional or Stomal Therapy Nurse (STN).

Consider taking an overnight drainage bag or leg bag with you. This can be especially useful when you have extended periods between pouch emptying.

**TIP**

Pack a separate, small travel kit containing supplies for a pouch change to make visits to the toilet simple and discreet.



Travelling with

Pouches and Supplies

Once you have prepared a travel checklist, packing equipment and pouches should be easy.

When you are at home, you probably keep most of your pouches and supplies together. For travel, you might want to consider dividing the items you will need and keep some in your carry-on bag. Put the rest in the luggage that you check with the airline or in the baggage of a travelling companion. That way, if one of the bags is lost, you still have supplies available in the other.

Your short-term needs should go in your carry-on luggage so they can remain with you at all times and are within easy reach. A separate, small travel kit containing items needed for a change of pouch should be kept in your carry-on luggage to make visits to the toilet simple and discreet.

Some airlines may not allow scissors on board the aircraft, even for ostomy products. So if you use a cut-to-fit product, be sure you have enough pre-cut skin barriers on hand before reaching your destination. You can pack your scissors in your checked luggage. Check with your airline and current travel authorities regulations.

## **Storage of ostomy products**

Storage of ostomy products is also important. They should not get too warm while in transit. When travelling by car, especially in warm and humid climates, do not keep supplies in the trunk or glove compartment. These are often the hottest spots in the vehicle. A cooler may be a useful container to transport your pouches.

Most manufacturers provide guidelines for storage of ostomy products. This is especially useful when staying in hot climate locations. Bathrooms are often coolest and, as long as they are not too steamy, are probably the best places to keep your products.

## Disposal

Disposal of used stoma pouches should not be difficult if you make proper preparations. Before changing your pouch, check that the sink is not in a separate room from the toilet and that a means to dispose of the pouch is available.

Make sure your travel kit contains toilet paper to wrap up the used pouch, as well as plastic carrier bags to dispose of them at a convenient place and time. Diaper disposal bags that come pleasantly scented or storage or freezer bags make disposal of used pouches simple and discreet. Carry cleansing wipes to clean up any accidental mess.

## Overnight stays at hotels and homes

Staying overnight — whether at a friend's or family member's home, a hotel in your own country, or abroad — need not be a cause for concern or worry.

At home, everything you need is available and you can expect privacy. With good planning, you can have everything you need neatly packed in your travel kit.

If you are staying in the home of friends or family who may not be aware of your special needs, you may be surprised at how understanding they can be. Explain briefly about your stoma, and if possible, try to not use the bathroom when you might end up being rushed.



Before staying in a hotel at home or abroad, try to make sure you have a bathroom en-suite or attached to your room. That way, pouch changes can be made easily in private and at your leisure, at a time convenient for you.



## Recommendations for

## Food, Drink and Clothing

### **Food and drink**

While travelling internationally, general recommendations on food and drink are the same for anyone. If in doubt about the quality of the water supply, buy bottled water for drinking and cleaning teeth. You should also use bottled water if you irrigate your colostomy.

Likewise, eating foods that have been well-cooked or washed in clean water, or come from a reliable source is important for everyone. Be aware of the possibility of becoming dehydrated in hot climates.

Any change of water, climate or food can upset a person's bowels, so be prepared. You may want to pack some antidiarrhoeal medications or rehydration salts just as a precaution. Antidiarrhoeal medications are available without a prescription from your pharmacist, and if taken at the first signs of diarrhoea, will usually prevent the problem from continuing. Be sure to discuss all medications with your healthcare professional.

Diarrhoea, particularly if accompanied by a fever and vomiting, may also lead to a shortage of salt in the body. The difficulty is knowing how much salt needs replacing. Don't take salt on its own, always add it to your food. If your diarrhoea persists for 24 hours, seek medical help.

## **Dehydration**

In hot climates, as chances of dehydrating increase, people with stomas should drink more fluids — preferably water. A sign of being dehydrated is the production of less urine than usual.

Special rehydrating solutions, such as sports drinks, can be useful for severe cases of dehydration and are readily available. However, commercial sports drinks also contain varying amounts of salt and sugar.

If you have antidiarrhoeal medication with you and watch what you eat and drink, you can enjoy the local delights; but be sensible and avoid excess. Also remember: too much alcohol will accelerate dehydration, so don't overdo it.

## Feeling confident

When you are on a holiday or vacation, you want to relax and enjoy yourself. Part of this is to be able to wear what you like.

With a stoma, there are very few restrictions on clothing. Just be careful to avoid especially tight clothing that may restrict the flow of body waste into your pouch.

There is no reason why people with a stoma cannot enjoy the beach or a pool. Depending on the position of your stoma, you may select a style of swimwear that makes you most comfortable.

Some people select a bold-patterned swimsuit that helps distract from any bulges that may be caused by the pouch. Some also find beach wraps and throws useful over their swimsuit.

If you can't find a swimsuit that you like, there are special suppliers that make bathing suits for special needs. Your local ostomy association or your STN can also help you find the right resources.



Enjoying Fitness

Activities and Sports

Stoma surgery is a major operation that should not be underestimated. The first few weeks or even months may be a struggle as you gradually adjust.

As long as you have no complications and your healthcare professional has no objection, you can enjoy any kind of sporting activity at home or while you are travelling. Contact sports and those that involve a lot of bending, such as bowling and aerobics, are possible.

If you would like to talk to someone about a particular sport, contact your local ostomy association. They may be able to put you in touch with someone who is currently enjoying your sport and can give you some practical recommendations.

The most important thing to remember is to plan ahead. If you do, your ostomy will not stand in the way of your enjoyment of travel.

# Procuring your ostomy product supplies

## Australia

In order to purchase your ostomy products at a subsidised rate, you will need to become a member of a Stoma Association. An annual membership fee is required to assist the association with administration costs.

Stoma Associations purchase ostomy products from suppliers such as Hollister Incorporated and distribute them to their members on a monthly basis. Most of these products are subsidised by the Australian Government. The Department of Health's **Stoma Appliance Scheme (SAS)**, established in 1975, improves access to the most suitable and clinically appropriate stoma-related products.

The **Australian Council of Stoma Associations Inc. (ACSA)** (website [www.australianstoma.com.au](http://www.australianstoma.com.au)) represents, at a national level, the interests of 21 regional Stoma Associations and approximately 46,000 people living with ostomies throughout Australia. The ACSA liaises with the Australian Government in matters related to accessing products funded through the SAS, coordinates ostomy-related support services, provides advocacy for people living with stomas, and publishes the national journal, *Ostomy Australia*.

## 1. How to order your ostomy products through the Stoma Appliance Scheme (SAS)

Once you become a member of a Stoma Association, you will be able to obtain your ostomy products at a subsidised rate. The Association will provide you with details on how to place your monthly order.

### Access SAS Forms

[www.australianstoma.com.au/associations](http://www.australianstoma.com.au/associations)

Your STN/healthcare professional can help you complete the necessary forms to become a member.

## 2. How to find a STN near your home

The Australian Association of Stomal Therapy Nurses (AASTN) – (website [www.stomaltherapy.com](http://www.stomaltherapy.com)) is a professional organisation of STNs. One of their major objectives is to promote quality care for a wide range of people with specific needs. These needs may be related to ostomy construction, urinary or faecal incontinence, wounds with or without tube insertion, and breast surgery.

The AASTN website provides a “**Find a Stomal Nurse**” feature to help you locate a STN in your State/Area. It also provides a helpful **Managing Your Stoma Supplies** guide.

## **New Zealand**

After surgery, your Stoma Nurse will establish a product fit that is right for you. Supply of your product is organised by your Stoma Nurse, via a distributor.

## **Useful links:**

### **Australia**

#### **Find a Stoma Association Near You**

[www.australianstoma.com.au/associations](http://www.australianstoma.com.au/associations)

#### **Find a Local Ostomy Support Group**

[www.australianstoma.com.au/living-well-with-a-stoma/support-groups-2/](http://www.australianstoma.com.au/living-well-with-a-stoma/support-groups-2/)

### **New Zealand**

#### **The Ostomy NZ**

[www.ostomy.org.nz](http://www.ostomy.org.nz)

(The Federation of Ostomy Societies NZ) represents, at a national level, the interests of 19 regional Ostomy Societies located throughout New Zealand. Helping ostomates and their families/caregivers feel educated and empowered to lead a normal life is the main focus.

#### **Cancer Society**

[ostomyasiasouthpacific.org](http://ostomyasiasouthpacific.org)

#### **Crohns and Colitis NZ**

[www.crohnsandcolitis.org.nz](http://www.crohnsandcolitis.org.nz)

# Resources and Organisations

Your healthcare professional and your STN will be very important resources for you in the days ahead. You also have ongoing access to online information or printed educational materials:

## Ostomy Learning Centre

Find useful content that's easy to read and share with others.

Australia: [www.hollister.com.au/ostomylearningcentre](http://www.hollister.com.au/ostomylearningcentre)

New Zealand: [www.hollister.co.nz/ostomylearningcentre](http://www.hollister.co.nz/ostomylearningcentre)



Understanding  
an Ostomy



Maintaining  
Skin Health



Living With  
an Ostomy



Using Ostomy  
Products

## Hollister Incorporated YouTube Channel

[www.youtube.com/hollisterincorporated](http://www.youtube.com/hollisterincorporated)

View a variety of how to and lifestyle videos. Also includes interviews and tips from people living with ostomies.

## **Australia**

### **Cancer Council of Australia**

*www.cancer.org.au*

### **Bowel Cancer Australia**

*www.bowelcanceraustralia.org*

### **Australian Council of Stoma Associations**

*www.australianstoma.com.au*

## **New Zealand**

### **Cancer Council of New Zealand**

*www.cancernz.org.nz*

### **Bowel Cancer New Zealand**

*www.bowelcancernz.org.nz*

### **The Federation of NZ Ostomy Societies Inc. (FNZOS)**

*www.ostomy.org.nz*

## **Lifestyle Series and Care Tips**

Available from your clinician or for PDF download at:

Australia:

***www.hollister.com.au/en-au/ostomycare/educationaltools***

New Zealand:

***www.hollister.co.nz/en-nz/ostomycare/educationaltools***

# Glossary

## **Codeine**

Medicine that slows and thickens stoma output. In some countries, this medication is illegal in any form without a prescription. Check before you travel.

## **Colon**

Another term for the large intestine or last portion of the gastrointestinal tract.

## **Colostomy**

An ostomy (surgical opening) created in the colon; part of the large intestine or colon.

## **Dehydration**

A loss of too much water from the body.

## **Diarrhoea**

Loose water-like faecal output from the stoma that is more so than usual.

## **Ileostomy**

An ostomy (surgical opening) created in the small intestine.

## **Infectious**

Can be spread from one person to the next; also “contagious.”

## **Peristomal Skin**

The area around the stoma starting at the skin/stoma junction and extending outward to the area covered by the pouching system.

## **Pouch**

The bag that collects output from the stoma.

## **Skin Barrier**

The portion of your pouching system that fits immediately around your stoma. It protects your skin and holds the pouching system in place. Sometimes called a wafer.

## **Stoma**

A surgically created opening in the gastrointestinal or urinary tract. Also known as an ostomy.

## **Stool**

Waste material from the bowel. Also known as faeces or bowel movement.

## **Urostomy**

An ostomy (surgical opening) created to drain urine.

## **Wear time**

The length of time a pouching system can be worn before it fails. Wear times can vary but should be fairly consistent for each person.



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**Hollister New Zealand**

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[www.hollister.co.nz](http://www.hollister.co.nz)

Customer Service  
**0800 678 669**

The information contained in this brochure is provided as general information only and is not intended to be medical advice. Please see our website for the most up to date information, as guidance can and does sometimes change. Always follow product Instructions For Use and ask your healthcare professional for more information.

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