

From One Ostomate to Another

CA volunteer, Frank Healy, asks:

Do You Measure Up?

Of all the calls I take on the helpline, after queries about travel, the question of leakage and skin irritation seem to be the most frequent.

All the normal advice about the use of adhesive removers and barrier creams, more often than not, is answered with: "I've tried all those!"

I then ask the question: "When did you last measure your stoma to check if the hole in the flange of your bag is the right size?" The reply is often: "Er...I don't know." Or "How do you do that?"

Measuring your stoma regularly is very important to make sure that the cut hole is not too small so that the flange rubs on the stoma and not too large so that the contents of the bag come into contact with the skin around the stoma causing irritation or leakage.

Changes to the size of new stomas are normal during the post-operative period. Initially after surgery the stoma is swollen due to the trauma. This swelling will gradually reduce over a period of time, and usually after six weeks it has settled down. Unfortunately no one can tell you how large the stoma will be after the operation or how small it will become. The stoma nurse will check this over during the first couple of weeks but after that it is up to you to keep a close watch on it.

Changes to the size and shape of established stomas can also occur over time. Most commonly the change is due to weight gain or sometimes it can be due to weight loss or a parastomal hernia.

It is very simple to check that you have the right sizing. Most manufacturers send a

If you have an anecdote you'd like to share, or hints and tips to pass on to other ostomates e-mail or write to the editorial team:

Via e-mail:
editor@colostomyassociation.org.uk

sizing guide with the box of bags. Find which one of the round holes or cut outs is closest to your size, allowing 1mm all around the stoma. You might need to stand in front of the mirror or ask a partner to check for you. Cut the bags to that size yourself or advise the delivery company of the new size the pre-cut flanges need to be.

An alternative way, particularly if your stoma is not round, is to use the plastic backing sheet which protects the adhesive on your current bag. The hole in it will be the same size as the hole in the flange. Put it in position around your stoma as shown in diagram. If the hole is too small mark where the backing sheet is touching the side of the stoma, then cut this area slightly bigger and try it again. If the hole is too large then you will need to place the backing sheet on a piece of paper and trace the outline of the

hole. Then cut the hole slightly smaller and try it around the stoma. It might take a few attempts to get it right. This will give you a new template which you can use to cut the flanges yourself or send to your delivery company when you order your next supply of bags.

Cutting the hole to the correct size will ensure that any sore or irritated skin that may have been exposed previously is covered. The baseplates are made of hydrocolloid which has healing properties and is kind to the skin. The skin will often heal within 24-48 hours.

If you are unsure if the hole in your flange is the correct size, or you would like help in cutting a template, consult your stoma care nurse.

Frank Healy



Correct size template



Incorrect size template

Two colostomates speak out: in Support of Drainable Bags

I was so pleased to read Sheila's hints & tips in the latest *Tidings* magazine.

I thought I was in a minority of one in using drainable bags for my colostomy. Even my stoma nurses seem to think I'm something of an oddity in preferring them to closed bags.

In my opinion it makes sense to use drainable bags. They're easy to empty, avoid the necessity of disposing of full bags, you use fewer bags each day (kinder

on the skin) and it's much easier to get rid of wind.

Lone Lee

I use a drainable pouch and after I've emptied it I wipe it, then pour a small plastic jug of warm water inside, swish it around and empty the water out.

I do this a couple more times until when the water comes out again it is almost clean.

Patricia Fisher