

Supporting and empowering you



# Active Ostomates®

Sport and fitness after stoma surgery

[www.ColostomyUK.org](http://www.ColostomyUK.org)

#ActiveOstomates



Freephone helpline:

**0800 328 4257**

24/7

# Colostomy UK

We are Colostomy UK. Here if you have questions, need support or just want to talk to someone who lives with a stoma.

Your voice on the bigger issues: advocates for your rights and campaigning to raise awareness of what matters to you; running projects to empower you; building communities to support you.

## Contact us

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# Sport and fitness after stoma surgery

Adapting to life with a stoma can be challenging and the thought of exercise may well be the last thing on your mind as you recover from surgery.

But, getting fit and being more active, could actually be the key to a faster recovery and a better quality of life afterwards. With time, there is every chance you will return to a good level of fitness and strength.

Provided you have agreement from your doctor or stoma care nurse, there is no medical reason why you can't participate in exercise and even competitive sport when you have a stoma.

The physical and mental benefits of exercise are well documented but, for someone with a stoma, maintaining a healthy weight and keeping your muscles strong can also help to prevent parastomal hernias developing. One of the greatest benefits of exercise is the 'feel good' aspect. Being able to participate in sport or fitness is good for your mental wellbeing. It is empowering and boosts your confidence. In turn, it helps you to cope with your stoma and enhances your quality of life.

Exercise also improves your body's circulation, which further aids the healing process. It can help you be more active without feeling weak and also stimulate your appetite.

Even if you were fit before surgery, it is important to start exercising slowly at first and build up gradually. You have been through a major operation and your body will take time to recover, so don't rush and don't expect too much of yourself to begin with. If you're new to exercise it can be harder to get motivated, so build up slowly and seek advice from a fitness trainer or physiotherapist if you have any concerns or queries.

It is normal to be lacking in confidence following stoma surgery. Likewise, you will probably have some worries about your bag leaking or perhaps feel anxious about the practicalities of physical activity. But try not to let this put you off. In the pages that follow you will find lots of tips and ideas to encourage you to get started, whether this be in the privacy of your own home or with others.



Being more active could be the key to a faster recovery and a better quality of life afterwards.

# Exercises to try at home

Gentle exercise is a vital part of getting better after an operation. During your hospital stay you will gradually be able to do more and more until you are fit enough to be discharged. It is important that you continue to progress when you are at home.

Read through the guidelines below a couple of times before you try any of the exercises:

- You may find it helpful to have your partner or a friend read the exercises out to you as you try each one.
- Make sure you are comfortable before you start. Never exercise just after you have eaten, or if you are unwell.
- Don't worry if you can only do some of the exercises; any gentle exercise is better than none at all.

The exercises that follow encourage core strength and can be repeated daily. As you will see, some of them can even be done while you are watching the television. Each of them works deeply, increasing the strength of your back and stomach muscles, helping to reduce back and posture problems as well as the risk of post-operative hernias. They can be performed on the bed, lying on a thick mat so that your spine is gently cushioned, or sitting on a chair.



## Pelvic floor exercise

- Sit tall and evenly on a hard chair, (use a cushion if necessary), with your feet on the floor, hip distance apart.
- Breathe deeply expanding your rib cage and try and sit up a little taller.
- As you breathe out gently squeeze the muscles around your bottom (anus), and at the same time think of drawing up the muscles of the vagina or between the scrotum and anus. This is known as 'engaging' your pelvic floor. Try to keep the spine and pelvis still and shoulders relaxed.

**TIP:** These muscles can often be located by sucking your thumb! (Or when you try and stop yourself from passing urine.) Repeat x 5.



## Arm raises

This exercise can help reduce tension in the neck and shoulders.

- Remain seated with your buttocks even on the chair, making sure your feet are firmly on the ground.
- Breathe in and sit a little taller.
- Breathe out, 'engage' your pelvic floor muscle and gently raise your right arm. Keep the elbow slightly soft and the shoulder blade set down your back.
- Breathe in and return the arm to your side.

**TIP:** Do not lean to the side as you raise your arm. Keep sitting tall. Repeat with each arm x 3.

## Pelvic tilts

(use a thick mat on the floor or lie on the bed)

- Lie on your back, with your knees bent and feet on the floor. Try to keep the natural shape of your spine. You will probably have a small gap under your lumbar region, just enough to fit half a hand underneath.
- Breathe in and try to relax the upper body.
- Breathe out, gently engage the pelvic floor muscle, and then start to slowly curl your lower spine off the mat, one vertebra at a time, increasing the arch in your back.
- Breathe in at the end of this pelvic tilt.
- Breathe out, draw up the pelvic floor and flatten your spine down one vertebra at a time.

**TIP:** Do not attempt to come up too high. Keep hold of the pelvic floor muscle while moving.



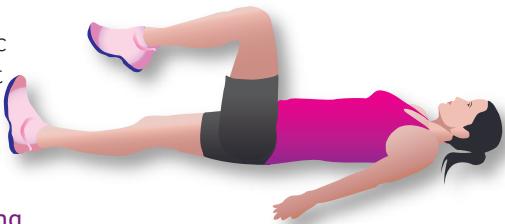
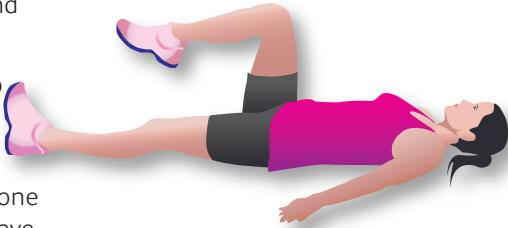


# Leg lifting

(use a thick mat on the floor or lie on the bed)

(DO NOT undertake this exercise for 8-12 weeks post surgery or until you feel comfortable).

- Lie flat on your back, keeping the natural shape of your spine and your pelvis very still.
- Breathe in, expanding your rib cage.
- As you breathe out, draw up the pelvic floor muscle, bring one knee up towards you so you have a right angle at your hip and knee.
- Breathe in, in this position.
- Breathe out, draw up the pelvic floor and slowly return the foot to the floor.



**TIP:** Do not put pressure on the foot that remains on the floor. Keep your core muscles working and do not allow your pelvis to move from side to side. Repeat each leg x 3.

## Knee rolls

(use a thick mat on the floor or lie on the bed)

- Lie flat on your back with your arms out to the sides.
- Breathe in.
- Breathe out, draw up the pelvic floor and gently roll your knees a little way to one side. Do not allow the knees to drop to the floor.
- While still in this position, breathe in and hold briefly.
- Breathe out, draw up the pelvic floor and, using your abdominal muscles bring the knees back up.



**TIP:** Keep both shoulders blades on the floor. Repeat each side x 3.



## Kneeling

(use a thick mat on the floor or lie on the bed)

- Kneel on all fours, making sure your knees are below your hips and your hands are under your shoulders. The elbows should not be locked and the back should be flat.
- Breathe in to the ribcage.
- Breathe out, draw up the pelvic floor, and try and lift your tummy towards your spine.
- Breathe in and release.



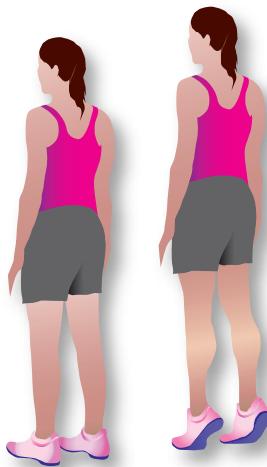
**TIP:** Try and keep your pelvis and spine still. Repeat x 3.



## Standing side bend

- Stand tall, keeping your arms by your side and your shoulders relaxed.
- Breathe in, and think of standing taller.
- Breathe out and draw up the pelvic floor. Gently lean to one side without pushing the hips out, sliding your hands down the outside thigh.
- Breathe in, and come back up to standing.
- Repeat to the other side.

**TIP:** Do not lean forward; imagine you are between two parallel walls. Repeat each side x 3.



### Calf raises

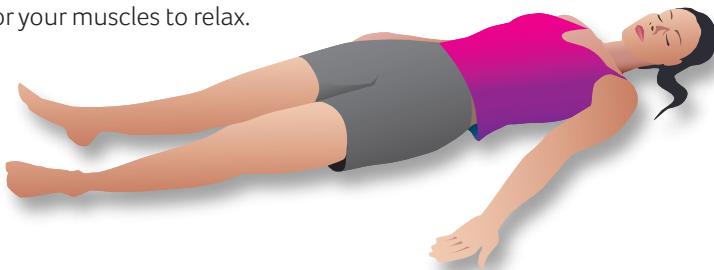
- Stand tall, keeping your shoulders relaxed and your arms down by your sides.
- Breathe in and push up on to your toes.
- Breathe out, engage your pelvic floor and slowly lower yourself down.

**TIP:** Try not to lean forward. Think of rising up in a straight line. Repeat x 5.

### Relaxation

(use a thick mat on the floor or lie on the bed)

- Lie down on your back with your legs outstretched. Allow your toes to drop to the sides. Have your arms (palms up) just a little way away from your body and relax the body into the mat. Take your breathing deep into the tummy, and just allow some time for your muscles to relax.





# Walking

Walking is a great way to exercise as it can be as gentle or as brisk as you like. After surgery, walking will get your system moving and can help your recovery.

Take things step-by-step to begin with; build up slowly, perhaps aiming to go a little further each day.

When you're fully recovered, walking longer distances and walking more briskly is a great way to stay fit. The NHS have recently launched a new 'Active 10' initiative which encourages people to take a 10-minute walk every day. It is supported by a free to download smartphone app. You could also consider joining a rambling group or a walking for health programme.

For more information on Active 10 (and to download the app) visit  
**[www.nhs.uk/oneyou/active10/](http://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/active10/)**

For more information on The Ramblers visit  
**[www.ramblers.org.uk](http://www.ramblers.org.uk)** or call **020 7339 8500**

To find your nearest Walking for Health activity visit  
**[www.walkingforhealth.org.uk](http://www.walkingforhealth.org.uk)** or call **020 7339 8541**

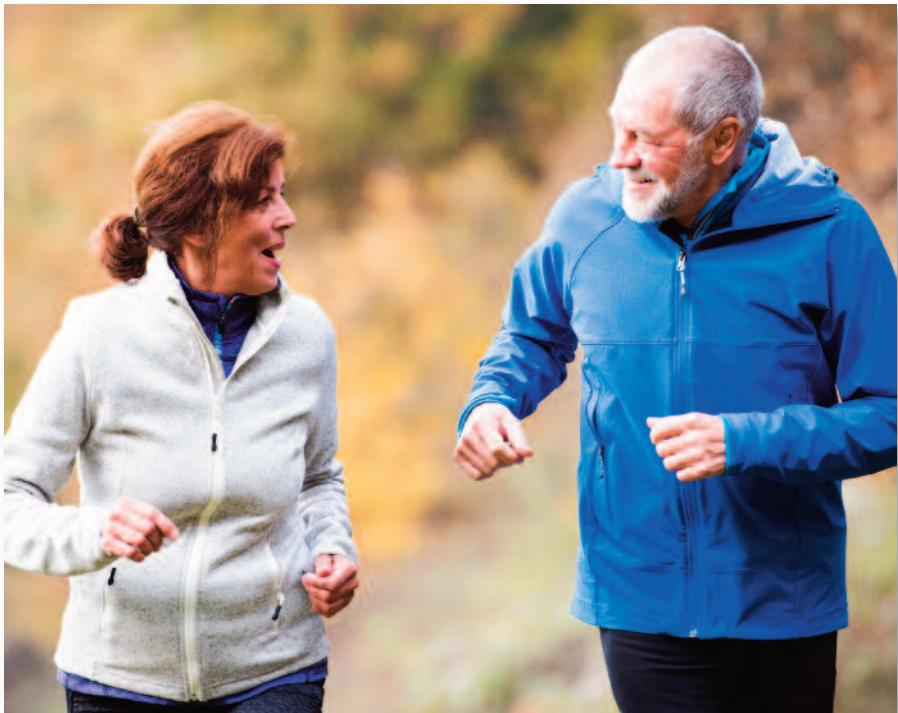


## Running and jogging

If you were a runner prior to surgery, there's no reason why you can't continue after your operation. You will just need to build back up slowly. If you are new to running, you can follow a 'beginners' programme just like anyone else.

Be aware though that you will need to work hard on your core stability – more so than someone who hasn't gone through abdominal surgery – to stay injury free, so ask a physiotherapist or qualified running coach for advice.

To find your local running club or search for suitable routes you can contact Run England on **0121 347 6543** or visit their activity finder at [www.runtogther.co.uk](http://www.runtogther.co.uk)





# Yoga and pilates

Your posture, strength and flexibility will all have been affected by surgery, periods of bed rest and recovery. A Pilates or yoga class is an ideal way to relax and rebuild confidence in your body while at the same time helping you to be more active. You may need to adopt positions where you lie on your stomach, so make sure to ask your instructor for advice and always listen to your body.

Since 2016 Colostomy UK has been running regular chair yoga sessions at various stoma support groups in the United Kingdom. These focus on relaxation, breathing techniques, movement, balance and coordination. They are very popular and are suitable for anyone, regardless of fitness level.

To find out more about our Active Ostomates® chair yoga sessions and to register your interest in the DVD, email: [info@ColostomyUK.org](mailto:info@ColostomyUK.org) or call **0118 939 1537**.



# Cycling

Riding a bike can be an excellent form of exercise for ostomates, as it does not put too much strain on your abdomen or involve heavy impact. Just like walking, cycling should be introduced gradually and then increased over time to higher levels of activity.

If you have a perineal wound, cycling is best avoided until the wound has healed, as sitting on the saddle may be uncomfortable.

To get tips on cycling or to find local clubs or routes contact the National Cycling Charity on **01483 238 337** or visit **[www.cyclingUK.org](http://www.cyclingUK.org)**





# Swimming

Swimming is a fantastic activity for people with a stoma as it promotes cardiovascular fitness and toning. It is natural to have concerns about swimming; some ostomates worry about their bag leaking or feel self conscious in pools or at the beach. However, the adhesive on stoma bags remains effective in water. Flange extenders can give you further security too. Likewise, there is a wide range of swimwear available that provides support and discretion. You can find further information about suppliers in our clothing factsheet. You can download this free from our website, or call us and we will send you a copy.

Although ostomates may worry that others in the pool will turn and stare at their bag, the truth is, most people won't even notice the colour of your swimming costume, let alone what may lie beneath it!

You can search for local swimming clubs and pools through:

Swim England [www.swimming.org](http://www.swimming.org)

Scottish Swimming [www.scottishswimming.com](http://www.scottishswimming.com)

Swim Wales [www.swimwales.org](http://www.swimwales.org)

and Swim Ulster [www.swimulster.net](http://www.swimulster.net)



## Fitness classes and the gym

Once you are fully recovered from surgery, you can start to use light weights in the gym and participate in fitness classes such as Zumba and aerobics. Start very gently and if you experience any discomfort or pain in your scar or around your stoma stop immediately. It can be helpful to have a programme put together for you by a trainer or physiotherapist. They can also show you how to execute the exercises properly. Most gyms and leisure centres offer this type of service.

There are a number of not-for-profit organisations that operate accessible leisure centres in the United Kingdom, many in partnership with local authorities. You can use the search engines on their websites to find your nearest centre.

Freedom Leisure [www.freedom-leisure.co.uk](http://www.freedom-leisure.co.uk)

GLL [www.better.org.uk/leisure](http://www.better.org.uk/leisure)

Everyone Active [www.everyoneactive.com](http://www.everyoneactive.com)





## Team and contact sports

If you participated in contact sports, (such as football, either code of rugby or martial arts) and wish to continue after surgery, there is no reason why you shouldn't, provided you are cautious and try to avoid injuring your stoma. Damage to the stoma is unlikely, but it is possible, so it is advisable to wear a 'stoma protector' over your bag whenever you practise or play. The same applies to sports like cricket, tennis or rounders, where you might be in danger of being hit in the abdomen. If you feel able to, then it might also be worth letting your fellow team mates know that you have a stoma.

If you feel inspired to take up a new sport, then you will find that your local County Sports Partnership advertises hundreds of local clubs for a wide range of sports.

To find your local CSP visit  
[www.cspnetwork.org/your-csp](http://www.cspnetwork.org/your-csp)



## Modified team sports

The last few years have seen the introduction of ‘modified’ versions of the nation’s favourite sports.

Although modified sports can take many forms, in general they are designed to provide an introductory and/or more accessible offering, aimed at particular groups in society. These include: children, people from the more mature age bracket, people with medical conditions, people whose lives are so busy they can only spare a little time and people who are simply looking for a new physical activity or the chance for social engagement.

Modified sports also provide opportunities to develop movement skills along with basic techniques in the sports concerned. Modified equipment, facilities and rules are commonly used to accommodate the developmental stage of participants (eg age, physical size, motor skill proficiency).

To find out more or to search for your nearest club, visit the links below:

Last man stands Cricket [www.lastmanstands.com](http://www.lastmanstands.com)

Touch Tennis [www.touchtennis.com/gb](http://www.touchtennis.com/gb)

Walking Football [www.thewfa.co.uk](http://www.thewfa.co.uk) and [www.walkingfootballunited.co.uk](http://www.walkingfootballunited.co.uk)

Walking Netball [www.englandnetball.co.uk/my-game/walking-netball](http://www.englandnetball.co.uk/my-game/walking-netball)

Walking Rugby [www.better.org.uk/walking-rugby](http://www.better.org.uk/walking-rugby)

Master Rugby League

[www.rugby-league.com/leagues\\_\\_competitions/masters\\_rugby\\_league](http://www.rugby-league.com/leagues__competitions/masters_rugby_league)



# Managing your stoma while being active

You may find it helpful to adjust meal times so that your stoma is less likely to be active during exercise. Alternatively you could change the time you are going to undertake an activity. Exercising with a full bag can be uncomfortable and it is also more likely to leak. It is through trial and error and listening to your body, that you will determine the right times to eat and exercise.

Some people find using flange extenders around their bag gives them increased security and added confidence, particularly if perspiration is a problem. If you haven't come across flange extenders before, then your stoma care nurse will be able to give you further information.

Other tips when undertaking exercise:

- Take some spare supplies with you in case of an emergency.
- If you are finding it difficult to get motivated to exercise, then try and focus on all the positives of physical activity. Ask your friends and family to encourage you or, better still, find someone that is willing to partner you and get fit too.
- It is important to stay well fuelled and hydrated during physical activity. High energy foods such as bananas and protein bars are easy to digest and have the added benefit of being easy to carry with you. Our *Healthy eating* booklet has further information. You can download this free from our website, or call us and we will send you a copy.

## Hernia prevention

When a stoma is formed, a potential site of weakness is created in the abdominal muscles. This can lead to a bulge developing under the skin around the stoma, where the contents of the abdomen push through the muscle layer. This is known as a parastomal hernia. It is thought that as many as 50% of ostomates have one. This is one of the key reasons why heavy lifting should be avoided after surgery (first three months) and then built up gradually afterwards, maintaining good posture all the time in order to encourage your muscles to develop correctly.

The development of a parastomal hernia is linked with being overweight and having poor abdominal muscles. Studies show that appropriate diet and abdominal exercises and the use of support belts and garments when engaged in physical activity significantly reduce the risk of developing a hernia. Details of these can be obtained from your stoma care nurse or via our website. We also produce a booklet about *Parastomal Hernias*, just call us for a copy or download one from our website.

**NB:** If you have a hernia, then you should speak to your doctor before undertaking any new exercise programme.



# Support from Colostomy UK

We hope that you have found this booklet useful. There are lots of other ways in which we can help and support you:

## We provide:

- A 24-hour free Stoma helpline: **0800 328 4257**.
- Support literature and factsheets about all aspects of *Living with a stoma*.
- *Tidings*, a quarterly magazine full of the latest news, articles by stoma care professionals, product information and real-life stories from other ostomates.
- A closed Facebook group for supporting each other and exchanging hints and tips.
- A website that provides practical information, details of open days and a directory of organisations, support groups, products and services.

# Team Colostomy UK

If you are keen to get active, take on a challenge and raise funds for us, why not join **Team Colostomy UK**. Whether you run 5K, complete a marathon, skydive or swim the channel. Do it as part of **Team Colostomy UK**. Together we can make a difference.

Email:

**[fundraising@ColostomyUK.org](mailto:fundraising@ColostomyUK.org)**  
to find out more.



This booklet is intended for general information and guidance only. Colostomy UK would like to take this opportunity to thank:

Jo Sica – Clinical Nurse Specialist – Stoma Care

Laura Swanton – Colorectal Physiotherapist and

Hubbard G, Beeken R, Taylor C, Munro J, Campbell A, Gracey J & Grimmett C (2017) *Physical activity programme for people recovering from bowel cancer surgery with a stoma, Manual*, University of the Highlands and Islands, Inverness

for their assistance in the production of this booklet.

**Colostomy UK's** flagship magazine *Tidings*, is hailed by ostomates and healthcare professionals alike for the support and information that it provides readers with on a quarterly basis.

**Visit our website or call us to sign up for your free copy.**

## How to contact us

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**Stoma helpline:** 0800 328 4257

**E-mail:** [info@ColostomyUK.org](mailto:info@ColostomyUK.org)

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