

Talking about Exercise... Thousands of colostomates enjoy a huge range of activities such as sailing, cycling and swimming as well as more down to earth pursuits like gardening and rambling. Bob Buckley (CA volunteer) tells his story extolling the benefits of exercise before and after surgery, whilst fellow ostomate, Ernie Millington tells us how he enjoyed exercise before he had his stoma and explains his remarkable journey back to health.



The benefits of exercise after surgery and beyond...

A few days after surgery exercise can be resumed. Light aerobic activity such as walking stimulates the return of bowel function and will get you back on the road to recovery, helping you regain the muscle tone lost whilst in hospital. Exercise also increases blood flow and thus aids healing, likewise deep breathing exercises. Always remember to keep hydrated - drink plenty of fluids.

Make exercise fun, find something that you enjoy.

Always check with your doctor or stoma care nurse before taking up any form of exercise.



Mark Twain once said "I am pushing sixty. That is enough exercise for me."

I have to say I don't agree with the great author

- I have always been keen on exercise, e.g. running, going to the gym, even football, until I broke my patella in my forties! I have always believed in *sit mens sana in corpore sano* (a healthy mind in a healthy body). I was always good at cross country running at school; however like most young men other pursuits took over!

However, in line with the boom in jogging, I picked up the running bug again in my 30's and joined Durham Harriers, taking part in nine great north runs (best time of 1 hour 23 mins). Into my late 50's I was still competing and very fit when to my huge surprise and chagrin I was diagnosed with bowel cancer and received the double whammy of being told I would need a permanent colostomy. I kept up my fitness regime right up to my operation; in fact I went for a five mile run the day before my surgery. I think my exercises helped in three ways;

- I firmly believe the fitter you are the better you recover from surgery
- Exercise helped keep me positive, all those endorphins released and
- The exercise helped me sleep at a very worrying time.

So off I went for the dreaded appointment still convinced I was going to recover in world record time,

boy was I in for a shock. The operation went well and the good news was my cancer was diagnosed as Dukes A, which apparently is the lowest grade you can get, phew!! All down hill from there, my bowel went into sleep mode so they had to feed me intravenously, my stitches burst open so I needed another bout of surgery and to cap it all I contracted an infection. At this stage Mrs B was very worried and stressed and it's worth mentioning that it is often much worse for our loved ones. After about three weeks I was discharged weighing about 2 stone less than my fighting weight, which is only 11 stone to start with. I felt very weak and was certainly in the most vulnerable position of my life. Nevertheless I have always been very positive so I decided to plan how I could get back to fitness.

To start with I listened to all the medical advice, e.g. don't strain or lift anything too heavy because of the danger of herniation. After a couple of days I decided to start walking, bearing in mind pre-op I had no problem running 10 miles or more. However to start with I just walked around the corner and back. This felt enough and to anyone recovering from surgery I would always say, don't overdo it, listen to your body. I continued to build up my distance over a few weeks until I could walk about 8 miles at a good pace.

At this stage I restarted my running regime, easy at first, gradually building up. I also went back to the gym to do some light weights for my upper body and some abdominal exercises. Previously, my stoma nurse Sue had given me a booklet which showed some gentle abdominal exercises so I built on those. If you

want to do abdominal exercises take advice because most people do them incorrectly with the danger of injuring their back.

I am now 62 and still exercise as much as possible. However, I do get more tired than I did in my 40's. Nothing to do with having a stoma, just Father Time creeping up on me. So I listen to my body and take the required rest days.

I never intended to let my stoma get in the way of what I want to do with my life and it's fair to say it hasn't. In fact I hardly ever discuss it. To sum up I would say whatever your sport there are some basic principles involved following surgery;

- Listen to the medical people, e.g. SCN, doctors, consultants when you are discharged from hospital.
- Discuss your fitness plan with your SCN and/or doctor before you begin, especially if you have to take any special precautions, e.g. for a heart condition
- Take your time. Getting fit and well should be treated as a marathon not a sprint
- Listen to your body and rest if you feel tired
- Seek advice in terms of the type of exercise you can and can't do. The suppliers of stoma care product have some great exercise booklets, ask the Colostomy Association for details.



"How so much good came from having my stoma"

I had been fit and athletic for most of my life. I had served in the British Army (para regiment) in my youth and always enjoyed keeping fit. I played squash, did weight training and some running before chronic ulcerative colitis affected my health eventually forcing an Ileostomy on me in 2004. I felt like I'd become an invalid, no longer 'normal' and I became depressed. I was told there was a possibility of reversal and so clung on to this hope, which didn't help me accept my stoma at all.

I became self conscious of my stoma, aware of it filling and felt sure that

everyone around me must be too. I developed a habit of holding my bag as I walked about, feeling like it needed supporting as it filled and started dragging.

Before my stoma I used to sleep without PJs but now felt my bag needed holding in place during the night and so resorted to underwear. However the position of my stoma meant that I couldn't find comfortable underwear to fit properly. Swimming was too embarrassing to even consider at that stage and so life had become quite limited. All the time though I still believed I could have a reversal and go back to 'normal' and couldn't wait for that day to come. That day never arrived because the surgeons were unable to reconnect the remaining bowel. It had 'rotted' away and so I had to accept that I was lucky to be alive and come to terms with my stoma.

It's funny though how unexpectedly things can turn around! I got talking about my stoma to my daughter and son-in-law who ran a small business designing and producing high performance sports wear (Comfizz), I suggested we work together on a new range of stoma support garments. Initially this was just for my own benefit but I was so delighted with the results that I showed them to my stoma nurse at St James Hospital in Leeds. She was so impressed that she asked us to attend a local open day, which was to become the first of many. You could say I was the perfect candidate to test out our new products. I soon found the garments supported my bag and almost forgot at times that I even had a stoma. The design of the garment sitting comfortably over my stoma, and the gentle pressure and support seemed to help expel gas and prevent the bag from bloating. The waistband was great for night time, holding the bag in place without the need to wear underwear. I also tested them out under my swimwear when I on holiday!

By now I was feeling much better and so positive about having helped create something that could benefit others like myself with a stoma. I wondered whether I ever would have achieved anything like this had I not suffered a stoma? As the saying goes

"Every cloud has a silver lining!"

If anyone is reading this has a new stoma or is about to have one, please believe there is always light at the end of the tunnel and I'm sure many great things lie ahead for you too.

I'm now over 70 years old and feel as if I have a new life. I walk my dog several miles every day, something I couldn't do when I was suffering with colitis. Although I'm not up to playing squash or running these days I am an active member of my local bowling club, playing in a league competing every week. I have four wonderful grandchildren, one is into motorsport, two are national divers (Olympic hopefuls!) and the fourth is too young to be into sports yet, plenty of reasons for me to feel inspired and to continue to live a full and active life. They all call my stoma "Grandad's hot water bottle" and it doesn't seem to bother them at all. They're just glad to have me around to taxi them to training, school or college and to cheer them on in competitions etc!

Editors Comment

If you have a similar story to tell or would like to reply to either Bob or Ernie please contact the Colostomy Association

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