

# Caring for a person with a stoma and dementia

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

Freephone helpline:

**0800 328 4257**



# 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

**Write to:**

Colostomy UK  
Enterprise House  
95 London Street  
Reading  
Berkshire  
RG1 4QA

**General enquiries:**

Tel: 0118 939 1537

**24-hour free helpline:**

0800 328 4257

**E-mail**

[info@ColostomyUK.org](mailto:info@ColostomyUK.org)

**Website:**

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



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# Hints and tips for healthcare professionals and carers

Teaching a person with dementia how to care for their stoma is not possible in all cases, but where it is possible, attempts should be made to encourage them. The level of independence achievable will vary. A person with dementia may benefit from extra time and repetition of the tips below. These were suggested by healthcare professionals who have been actively involved in the care of ostomates with dementia.

## **Bag changing and stoma care**

- Lessons should break tasks down into small, simple steps, with repetition and continuity being key components.
- Where possible, the above should take place in quiet and familiar surroundings.
- Some people with dementia benefit from written instructions. Others may be helped by the diagrams on pages 6 and 7.
- If the person with dementia is elderly, it is important to remember that they may have other conditions (such as hearing loss) that can impair learning and so need to be taken into account.
- People with dementia who are actively involved in changing their bags should be encouraged to wear gloves. This reduces the risk of infection, faeces under the nails and faecal spreading.
- Some people with dementia who require their bag to be changed for them might resist. In these cases, distraction could help. For instance, encouraging the person to clean their teeth or brush their hair during the process might be helpful. Standing the person in front of a mirror so they can focus on the task they are performing and not the bag change can also help.

## Practical matters

Fiddling with the bag and inappropriate bag removal can be avoided by:

- Putting on net pants with normal underwear on top, following bag changes.
- Tucking the person with dementia's vest/ shirt/ blouse into their pants.
- Keeping the person with dementia occupied with small tasks as a way of distracting their attention.
- Noting the timings of bowel movements to ensure, where possible, timely bag changes take place. Bag fiddling is often triggered by a heavy bag.

## Other considerations:

- If the person is living at home, then visits from the community nurse should be scheduled for mid-morning. This allows the person time to get into their 'morning' routine.
- Bag choice is important. One-piece bags with a pre-cut aperture have the advantage of being uncomplicated for both the person and carer. Two-piece bags, where the flange can remain in situ for up to three days, helps protect the skin where frequent changes are necessary.

## Medication

The bowel plays an important role in the absorption of medication. As stoma surgery often involves the removal of a large amount of the bowel, it is vital to consider the impact that this might have on a person taking drugs for their dementia and other conditions. It is therefore important for carers to be aware of this and ensure that the matter is discussed with the appropriate healthcare professional both pre- and post-operatively, and when any changes to medication take place.

## Changing stoma bags

A bag is best changed when about three-quarters full. This makes the process easier and the ostomate more comfortable. It is usually carried out in the bathroom, but if the ostomate is seated, this can mean folds or creases form around the stoma making it difficult to achieve a good seal between the skin and the flange/base-plate. It may be best to remove the used bag and attach the new one when the ostomate is standing. However, if this is not possible then an alternative might be for the ostomate to lay flat on a bed.

### 1. Before you begin

Check whether the hole in the adhesive flange/base-plate has been pre-cut to the size and shape of the stoma. If not, use a template to mark the outline of the stoma and, using curved scissors, trim to the correct shape (*Fig 1*). If the hole is too large, skin will show and be irritated by the contents of the bag, which can make it sore (*Fig 2*). If the hole is too small, it may rub against the stoma and cause it to swell.



*Fig 1 – Correct*



*Fig 2 – Incorrect*

### Make sure you have what you need:

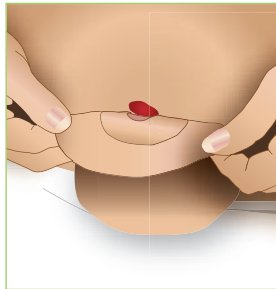
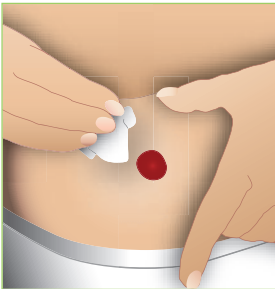
- Disposal bag.
- Adhesive remover, if used.
- Warm water and a towel.
- New stoma bag.
- Scissors (if required).

## 2. Removing the used bag

Remove used bag (use adhesive remover if required). Check the skin around the stoma for any early signs of irritation. Gently clean the stoma and surrounding skin with warm water. Do not use soaps or baby wipes as these often contain perfume or moisturisers and may affect how the flange/base-plate sticks, or may irritate the skin.

## 3. Fitting the new bag

Gently pat the skin until it is completely dry. Press the flange/base-plate in place for at least half a minute to make sure the seal is secure (if using a two-piece bag, then attach the bag to the base-plate).



*Changing a stoma bag*

## Disposal of used bags

Seal the used bag inside a disposal bag (provided free by suppliers). In a nursing home this can be disposed of with other clinical waste.

A domestic clinical waste collection service is available in some areas. Contact the environmental department of the local council for more details. If this service is not available in your area, the used bag may be wrapped up well and put in the dustbin. Some people prefer to empty the contents of the stoma bag into the toilet before discarding it in this way.

Bags with liners that contain the motions and can be flushed down the toilet are now available.



# Support from Colostomy UK

We hope that you have found this booklet useful. Please contact us if we can support you further.

## **We provide:**

- A 24-hour free helpline: 0800 328 4257.
- Information booklets, leaflets and factsheets about all aspects of living with a colostomy.
- *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.

# Support from Dementia UK

Dementia UK provides specialist dementia support for families through their Admiral Nurse service. When things get challenging or difficult for people with dementia and their families, Admiral Nurses work alongside them, giving the one-to-one support, expert guidance and practical solutions people need.

If you're caring for someone with dementia or if you have any concerns or questions, call or email the Admiral Nurse Dementia Helpline for specialist support and advice on **0800 888 6678** or email **helpline@dementiauk.org**

This booklet has been produced in conjunction with Dementia UK.



Open Monday – Friday: 9am – 9pm

Saturday and Sunday: 9am – 5pm

Registered charity in England and Wales (1039404) and Scotland (SC047429)

020 7697 4160 • [www.dementiauk.org](http://www.dementiauk.org)

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**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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