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PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# Diet Guidelines for People with a Colostomy

This information describes dietary (eating and drinking) guidelines to follow while your colon is healing. It also explains how to manage common side effects of having a colostomy.

## General Eating and Drinking Guidelines

Follow the guidelines below for the first few weeks after your surgery. This will help prevent discomfort while your colon heals.

- Eat small, frequent meals. Try to have 6 small meals throughout the day instead of 3 large ones.
- Eat slowly and chew your food well.
- Drink 8 to 10 (8-ounce) glasses of liquids every day.
- Eat mostly bland, low-fiber foods. Read the “Recommended foods” section for more information.
- When you add foods back to your diet, introduce them one at a time. Read the “Adding foods to your diet” section for more information.

Before you’re discharged from the hospital, a clinical dietitian nutritionist will visit you in your hospital room to talk with you about these guidelines. After you leave the hospital, your doctor and a clinical dietitian nutritionist will help you as you go back to following your usual diet.

## Recommended foods

It’s best to eat mostly bland, low-fiber foods for the first few weeks after your

surgery. Bland foods are cooked, easy-to-digest foods that aren't spicy, heavy, or fried. Eating bland foods will help you avoid uncomfortable symptoms such as diarrhea (loose or watery bowel movements), bloating, and gas.

The following tables include examples of bland, low-fiber foods. If you have questions about foods not listed in these tables, contact a clinical dietitian nutritionist.

<b>Milk and dairy</b>	
<p><b>Foods to include in your diet</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-fat (skim) or low-fat (1% or 2%) milk*</li> <li>• Powdered milk*</li> <li>• Non-dairy milks (such as soy milk and almond milk)</li> <li>• Lactose-free dairy products (such as Lactaid® products)</li> <li>• Yogurt*</li> <li>• Cheese*</li> <li>• Low-fat ice cream or sherbet</li> <li>• Eggs**</li> </ul>	<p><b>Foods to limit</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High-fat milk and dairy products, such as:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Whole milk</li> <li>◦ Regular ice cream or sherbet</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Milk and dairy products with lactose (if you have diarrhea after having them)</li> </ul>

\* If you have diarrhea after having these products, try non-dairy milks or lactose-free cheese or yogurt instead.

\*\* When trying eggs, start with a small amount (such as 1 egg). Eggs may cause a bad odor (smell) when you open your pouch.

<b>Meats and proteins</b>	
<p><b>Foods to include in your diet</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lean animal proteins, such as:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Meat without visible fat</li> <li>◦ Skinless poultry</li> <li>◦ Fish*</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Nuts and nut butter (such as peanut butter)*</li> </ul>	<p><b>Foods to limit</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High-fat foods, such as fried meat, poultry, or fish</li> <li>• High-fiber foods, such as dried or canned legumes (beans)</li> </ul>

\* When trying fish, nuts, and nut butter, start with small amounts. These foods may cause odor when you open your pouch.

<b>Grains</b>	
<b>Foods to include in your diet</b>  Low-fiber foods, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• White bread, pasta, and rice</li><li>• Bagels, rolls, and crackers made from white or refined flour</li><li>• Cereals made from white or refined flour, such as Cream of Wheat<sup>®</sup>, Rice Chex<sup>®</sup>, and Rice Krispies<sup>®</sup></li></ul>	<b>Foods to limit</b>  High-fiber foods, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Whole grains, such as whole wheat bread, brown rice, bran cereal, quinoa, and buckwheat</li></ul>

<b>Vegetables</b>	
<b>Foods to include in your diet</b>  Low-fiber foods, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Well-cooked vegetables without skins or seeds, such as peeled potatoes, peeled zucchini with the seeds removed, and peeled tomatoes with the seeds removed</li><li>• Lettuce</li><li>• Strained vegetable juice</li></ul>	<b>Foods to limit</b>  High-fiber foods, such as raw vegetables (except lettuce)

Some vegetables may cause gas or odor for some people. If a certain vegetable causes gas or odor, avoid eating that vegetable. Read the section “Guidelines for Managing Common Problems” for more information.

## Fruits

### Foods to include in your diet

Low-fiber foods, such as:

- Pulp-free fruit juice (except prune juice and grape juice)
- Peeled fruit (such as a peeled apple)
- Canned fruit (except pineapple)
- Fruits with thick skins. Examples include:
  - Soft melons, such as watermelon and honeydew
  - Orange without the membrane (the thin clear or white part around each orange section)
  - Ripe banana

### Foods to limit

High-fiber foods, such as:

- Raw fruits with the skin. Examples include:
  - Apples
  - Strawberries
  - Blueberries
  - Grapes
- Prune juice
- Grape juice

Some fruits may cause discomfort for some people. If a certain fruit causes discomfort, avoid eating that fruit. Read the section “Guidelines for Managing Common Problems” for more information.

## Fats

### Foods to include in your diet

- Foods cooked with a small amount of fat (such as olive or canola oil)

### Foods to limit

- High-fat foods, such as fried foods

When eating fats, start with a small amount. Fats may cause discomfort.

## Drinks

### Drinks to include in your diet

- Water
- Decaffeinated coffee or tea
- Drinks that aren't carbonated
- Sports drinks (such as Gatorade® and Powerade®)

### Drinks to limit

- Carbonated drinks, because they may cause gas

## Reading Nutrition Facts labels

You can find the amount of fiber that's in your food by looking at the Nutrition Facts label (see Figure 1). Nutrition Facts labels can help you compare the nutritional information in different foods.

<b>Nutrition Facts</b>	
8 servings per container	
<b>Serving size</b>	<b>2/3 cup (55g)</b>
<b>Amount per serving</b>	
<b>Calories</b>	<b>230</b>
<b>% Daily Value*</b>	
<b>Total Fat</b> 8g	<b>10%</b>
Saturated Fat 1g	5%
Trans Fat 0g	
<b>Cholesterol</b> 0mg	<b>0%</b>
<b>Sodium</b> 160mg	<b>7%</b>
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 37g	<b>13%</b>
Dietary Fiber 4g	14%
Total Sugars 12g	
Includes 10g Added Sugars	20%
<b>Protein</b> 3g	
Vitamin D 2mcg	10%
Calcium 260mg	20%
Iron 8mg	45%
Potassium 235mg	6%

\* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

Figure 1. Fiber information on a Nutrition Facts label

## Adding foods to your diet

After your surgery, you may have some food intolerances that you didn't have before surgery. A food intolerance is when eating a certain type of food causes uncomfortable symptoms such as diarrhea, bloating, gas, or odor. Sometimes, food intolerances go away as your colon heals.

When you add foods back to your diet, introduce them one at a time. If a specific item of food causes uncomfortable symptoms, avoid eating it for a few weeks, then try it again. No two people will react the same way to food. You will learn through experience which foods, if any, you should avoid.

For more information about managing food intolerances and other common problems, read the “Guidelines for Managing Common Problems” section.

## **High-fiber foods**

During your first appointment after surgery (about 2 weeks after your surgery), your doctor will tell you if you can start slowly adding high-fiber foods back into your diet. Doing this will help make your stool bulkier (more solid).

When you start adding high-fiber foods to your diet, do so gradually, by adding one food at a time. Make sure you’re also drinking enough liquids. Aim to drink 8 to 10 (8-ounce) glasses every day.

# **Guidelines for Managing Common Problems**

This section has guidelines for changing your diet to help manage common problems. You don’t need to follow these guidelines unless you’re having the problems listed.

If certain foods caused discomfort before your surgery, they will still cause discomfort after your surgery.

## **Diarrhea**

Diarrhea is having loose or watery bowel movements more than 4 times in 1 day. Diarrhea can be caused by:

- Certain foods
- Skipping meals
- Food poisoning
- An infection in your intestine
- Antibiotics and other prescription medications
- A blockage in your intestine

If you’re having diarrhea, follow the guidelines below.

- Contact your doctor’s office. They may give you a medication to help.
- Drink 8 to 10 (8-ounce) glasses of liquids throughout the day.
  - Drink sports drinks (such as Gatorade or Powerade) or an oral rehydration solution (such as Pedialyte), if you can.
  - If you don’t have these, you can make your own using the ingredients below.
    - 4 cups (1 liter) of water
    - 1 cup (250 milliliters) of orange juice
    - 8 teaspoons (40 milliliters) of sugar
    - 1 teaspoon (4 milliliters) of salt

Put all ingredients into a cup with a lid. Shake well so the sugar and salt dissolve.

- Avoid the following foods and drinks. They may cause diarrhea.

<b>Foods that may cause diarrhea</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Alcohol (such as beer and wine)</li> <li>○ Bran</li> <li>○ Broccoli</li> <li>○ Brussels sprouts</li> <li>○ Cabbage</li> <li>○ Caffeinated drinks (especially hot drinks)</li> <li>○ Chocolate</li> <li>○ Corn</li> <li>○ Foods with artificial sweeteners (such as mannitol, sorbitol, and xylitol)</li> <li>○ Fried meats, fish, and poultry</li> <li>○ Fruit juice (such as prune, apple, grape, and orange juices)</li> <li>○ Green leafy vegetables</li> <li>○ High-fat foods</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ High-sugar foods</li> <li>○ Legumes (such as cooked or dried beans)</li> <li>○ Licorice</li> <li>○ Milk and dairy products with lactose, if you’re lactose-intolerant</li> <li>○ Nuts or seeds</li> <li>○ Peas</li> <li>○ Spicy foods</li> <li>○ Stone fruits (such as apricots, peaches, plums, and prunes)</li> <li>○ “Sugar-free” canned or dried fruits</li> <li>○ Tomatoes</li> <li>○ Turnip greens</li> <li>○ Whole grains (such as wheat bread)</li> </ul>

- Eat more of the following foods. They may help thicken bowel movements.

<b>Foods that may help thicken bowel movements</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Applesauce</li> <li>◦ Bananas</li> <li>◦ Barley*</li> <li>◦ Boiled white rice</li> <li>◦ Cheese</li> <li>◦ Creamy nut butter (such as peanut butter)</li> <li>◦ Marshmallows</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Oatmeal*</li> <li>◦ Pasta</li> <li>◦ Potatoes without the skin</li> <li>◦ Pretzels</li> <li>◦ Saltine crackers</li> <li>◦ Tapioca</li> <li>◦ White bread</li> <li>◦ Yogurt</li> </ul>

\* These foods are whole grains. It's okay to eat them if you're having diarrhea, because they may help thicken your bowel movements.

## Constipation

Constipation is having fewer than 3 bowel movements per week, having hard bowel movements, having a hard time passing bowel movements, or all 3. Constipation can be caused by:

- Certain pain medications
- Certain anti-nausea medications
- Not eating enough fiber
- Not exercising enough
- Not drinking enough liquids

If you're constipated, follow the guidelines below.

- Contact your doctor's office. They may give you a medication to help.
- Try drinking hot water with lemon or lemon juice, coffee, or prune juice.
- Do light exercise (such as walking), if you can.
- Ask your doctor if eating high-fiber foods or taking a fiber supplement will help.



## Gas and odor

For the first few weeks after your surgery, it's normal to have gas in your pouch and odor when you open your pouch. You may have more gas if you had a robotic surgery.

If you're having problems with gas or odor, ask your wound, ostomy, and continence (WOC) nurse for suggestions. You can also follow the guidelines below.

- Avoid the following things. They can cause gas.
  - Chewing gum
  - Drinking with a straw
  - Smoking or chewing tobacco
  - Eating too fast
  - Skipping meals
- Ask your doctor or nurse if you can take an over-the-counter medication such as Beano<sup>®</sup> or simethicone before meals to help prevent gas.
- Eat less of the following foods. They may cause gas, odor, or both.

<b>Foods that may cause gas, odor, or both</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ Asparagus</li><li>◦ Alcohol, especially beer</li><li>◦ Broccoli</li><li>◦ Brussels sprouts</li><li>◦ Cabbage</li><li>◦ Carbonated drinks (such as soda)</li><li>◦ Cauliflower</li><li>◦ Corn</li><li>◦ Dried beans and peas</li><li>◦ Eggs</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ Fish</li><li>◦ Garlic</li><li>◦ Grapes</li><li>◦ Leeks</li><li>◦ Milk and dairy products with lactose, if you're lactose-intolerant</li><li>◦ Onions</li><li>◦ Peanuts</li><li>◦ Prunes</li></ul>

- Eat more of the following foods. They may help prevent gas, odor, or both.

Foods that may prevent gas, odor, or both	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Buttermilk</li> <li>◦ Cranberry juice</li> <li>◦ Kefir</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Parsley</li> <li>◦ Yogurt</li> </ul>

## Call Your Doctor if You Have:

- Diarrhea and a fever above 100.4 °F (38 °C).
- Diarrhea and vomiting (throwing up).
- Diarrhea that doesn't stop after 24 hours.
- Diarrhea and smelly discharge, cramps, or forceful liquid output from your stoma.

If you have questions about your diet, call 212-639-7312 to speak with an outpatient clinical dietitian nutritionist. You can reach a staff member Monday through Friday from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM.

For more resources, visit [www.mskcc.org/pe](http://www.mskcc.org/pe) to search our virtual library.

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