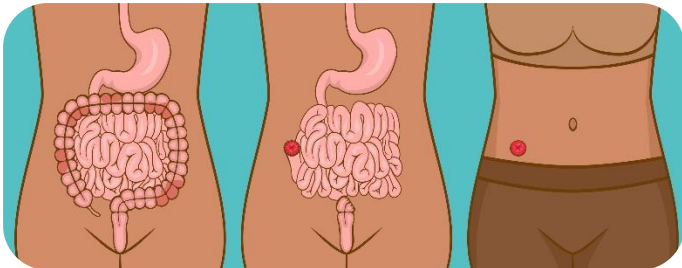


Eating Well after Ileostomy Surgery

What is an ileostomy?

An **ileostomy** is when the last part of the small intestine (ileum) is moved to an opening on the skin.

A **stoma** is the opening in the abdomen where the small intestine is brought to the skin.



Small and large intestines before surgery.

Small intestine brought to the skin's surface.

Stoma after ileostomy surgery.



When you have an ileostomy, food that has not been broken down (undigested) goes to an **ileostomy pouch or bag** instead of the large intestine. The ileostomy bag collects output as it passes from your body through the stoma.

Output is the liquid and pieces of undigested food in the ileostomy pouch or bag.

Impacts on nutrition

An ileostomy changes how your body digests food and gets nutrients. With an ileostomy, your body has less intestine (bowel) to absorb water, nutrition, and electrolytes like potassium and sodium.

It is important to get enough nutrition daily to help:

- heal, recover, and fight infection
- maintain muscle strength
- prevent muscle loss

With time, you will be able to enjoy the food and drinks you did before getting an ileostomy.

First 6–8 weeks after surgery

Your body needs time to heal after getting an ileostomy. After surgery there will be some swelling at the stoma. Swelling will go down as it heals.

Gradually try different foods and drinks while your stoma heals.

- Cut food into small pieces and **chew your foods well**. This helps with digestion and lowers the risk of a stoma blockage.
- Spread meals and snacks throughout the day to help your body manage your output.
- Eat soft foods that are lower in fibre. These are easier to break down, digest, and pass through your stoma after surgery.
 - Choose cooked grains and grain products like white rice, white pasta, white bread, and oatmeal.
 - Remove the skins, peels, and seeds from vegetables and fruits.
 - Cook or stew vegetables and fruits. Try adding vegetables to soups.
 - Blend vegetables and fruits into smoothies or sauces.
- Bland foods may be easier to digest than spicy foods if you don't usually eat spicy foods.

After your first 6–8 weeks with an ileostomy

Continue adding foods and drinks with the goal of eating the way you did before surgery. This includes foods higher in fibre. Gradually add higher fibre foods.

Monitor how you feel after eating or drinking different food or fluids. See if you notice any change in your output and continue to chew your foods well.

Ostomy output

After surgery, your output will be watery. As your small intestine heals, it will absorb more water and your output will change to an applesauce or pudding-like consistency. Your output will thicken more as your body tolerates (gets used to) a wider variety of foods.

You will notice that some foods and fluids may change the consistency or amount of your output.

The amount of output in your ileostomy bag is different for each person.

People with an ileostomy may need to empty their ileostomy bag 6–8 times daily, and perhaps during the night.

See the Managing Side Effects section on page 3 for information on high output.

Stoma blockage

While your ileostomy heals, some foods can increase the risk of a blockage. These foods may include:

- higher fibre foods:
 - corn, popcorn
 - dried fruits such as currants and raisins
 - fruits with membranes such as grapes, grapefruit, and oranges
 - fruits that are tough or stringy such as coconuts and pineapples
 - tough, leafy greens such as bok choy, cabbage, celery, kale, and spinach
 - whole grains and whole grain bread products
- nuts and seeds
- meats with casings (such as sausage)

These foods can still be eaten but in easier to digest forms. For example, choose smooth peanut butter instead of whole peanuts or crunchy peanut butter.

Continue to chew foods well. Once your ileostomy has healed, gradually add these foods back in.

Signs of a blocked stoma

- constant liquid or watery ileostomy output
- constipation, low, or no ileostomy output
- lower or no appetite
- painful stomach-ache or cramps
- peeing less
- nausea or vomiting



Blockages can be serious.

Contact your surgeon's office or go to the Emergency Department right away if you suspect a blockage.

Get enough nutrition

After surgery, your body needs extra nutrition to heal. Eat a variety of foods daily that you enjoy. Check out some sample meals on page 4.

Eat protein foods

Protein foods can help you heal and recover.

To get enough, eat protein foods at every meal and snack.

Check out ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts for high protein meal and snack ideas.

Nutrition supplements

Eating well and staying hydrated is important.

Protein and nutrition supplement drinks

If you have a poor appetite and are not eating well, a nutrition supplement drink may help. They can give you extra calories, protein, vitamins, and minerals.

Some nutrition supplements can be higher in sugar. This may cause more output.

- Choose nutrition supplement drinks with less sugar, like Glucerna® or Boost® Carb Smart.
- Choose unflavoured protein powder to mix into mashed potatoes, soups, oatmeal, or casseroles.

Vitamins, minerals, and herbs

People with ileostomies are at a higher risk of nutrition deficiencies, such as vitamin B12, iron, magnesium, and folate. Children may need extra nutrition to maintain their growth. A daily chewable multivitamin and mineral supplement may help give you this extra nutrition. Take as directed on the label.

Your healthcare team may check your blood levels regularly to ensure you are getting enough vitamins and minerals.

Some supplements may cause higher output, change the odour, consistency, or colour of ileostomy output. Some may interact with medications.

Check with your healthcare team **before** taking any vitamin, mineral, or herbal supplement. If you are worried you are not getting enough nutrition, ask for a referral to a dietitian.

Drink enough fluids daily

Drinking enough helps your ileostomy work properly. Fluid includes water and other liquids such as oral rehydration solutions (like Pedialyte® or G2®), milk, fortified soy beverage, tea, and broth.

Age (Years)	Recommended amount of fluid to drink daily	
	Females	Males
2–3	4 cups (1 L)	
4–8	5 cups (1.2 L)	
9–13	6 cups (1.6 L)	7 cups (1.8 L)
14–18	7 cups (1.8 L)	10 cups (2.6 L)
18–64	9–12 cups (2.25–3 L)	
65+	6–8 cups (1.5–2 L)	

You may need more than the recommended amount of fluid daily. Drink more after being active or when it's hot outside.

Try to drink enough each day to prevent dehydration. Dehydration is when your body doesn't get enough fluid.

Watch for signs of dehydration

These include:

- dry mouth
- dry skin
- headaches
- feeling thirsty
- feeling dizzy
- low blood pressure
- nausea
- muscle cramping
- peeing less or dark pee
- weight loss

If you think you may be dehydrated, try to drink more water or oral rehydration solution, and monitor your symptoms. **If they do not improve, contact your healthcare team.**

Visit ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts for oral rehydration solution recipes you can make at home.

Sodium loss

Sodium (salt) is an electrolyte needed by the body. The colon is where sodium is absorbed. With an ileostomy, sodium doesn't reach the colon to be absorbed. Instead, sodium is lost in your output.

To get enough sodium, don't limit salt in your diet. If you usually eat lower salt foods, add ½–1 tsp (3–5 mL) salt to your food daily while cooking.

Managing side effects

Everyone is different. If a food doesn't bother you, you don't need to avoid it.

High output

Monitor how often you need to empty your ileostomy bag. If it needs to be emptied much more than usual, you are at risk of dehydration. **High ileostomy output can be serious. You may need to go to the hospital.**

Children

Your surgeon or ostomy doctor (gastroenterologist) will tell you what to expect as normal output and what is high output. This can be based on the weight of your child.

Adults

If you are emptying your bag every 2 hours, or there are more than 6 cups (1.5 L) output in a day. Check out ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts for information on nutrition for high output ostomy.

Foods that may increase output

Certain foods and ingredients can make ileostomy output higher or looser. These include:

- alcohol including beer, ciders, spirits, and wine
- caffeinated drinks such as coffee, tea, cola, and energy drinks
- fatty meats like bacon, salami, and bologna
- milk (if you are intolerant to lactose)
- spicy foods, if not used to eating them
- sugar alcohols, which are a type of sugar substitute. Check ingredient lists on food labels for:
 - erythritol – maltitol – sorbitol
 - isomalt – mannitol – xylitol
- sugary food and drinks such as candies, energy drinks, iced tea, juice, and regular pop
- vegetables like broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, and onions

Foods that may slow output

To thicken and slow your ileostomy output, try:

- applesauce
- banana
- boiled milk
- bread (white) or pasta
- hard cheese
- marshmallows (3 large)
- oatmeal
- pretzels
- smooth peanut butter
- tapioca
- yogurt

Gas or odour (smell)

Some people notice that certain foods, fluids, or actions cause gas or odour. Gas and odour are normal signs of digestion.

Monitor how your body responds (gas, bloating, or change in ileostomy output). If it doesn't bother you, continue to eat them.

Gas-causing

- beer
- beans
- broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, garlic, onion
- chewing gum
- fizzy drinks like pop and sparkling water
- gulping liquids or drinking fast
- using drinking straws

Odour-causing

- alcohol including beer, ciders, spirits, and wine
- asparagus, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, garlic, and onion
- coffee
- eggs
- fish
- some spices like coriander, cumin, curry, and turmeric
- strong cheese like blue cheese, 'old' cheese

Sample meals for first 6–8 weeks

Meal	Day 1	Day 2
Breakfast	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• cheese omelette• white toast or white English muffin with smooth peanut butter• banana	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• smoothie with peaches, Greek yogurt, and spinach• cold or hot cereal with milk
Lunch or dinner	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• fish or chicken wrap with cooked peppers with baby spinach• pears, skin removed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• grilled meat or tofu• mashed potatoes, white rice, or white pasta• cooked carrots and green beans

More support

- Ostomy Canada Society ostomycanada.ca.
- Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete a [self-referral form](#) on ahs.ca/811.
- Visit ahs.ca/Nutrition.