Essential information before Formation of a Colostomy

Introduction

This leaflet supports the discussions you are having about the formation of a colostomy and includes information about stoma function, training in stoma care, obtaining equipment and sources of support. It also includes information about common stoma related risks and complications to be aware of.

Discussions with a Specialist Nurse are aimed at preparing you fully for the surgery. This is an opportunity for you to see stoma appliances, discuss how the stoma is managed and for the best possible position for your stoma to be sited. This will also allow the most suitable appliance for you to be chosen to help you adapt to life with a stoma. You may want to speak to someone who has had stoma surgery in the past which can also be arranged for you. Just ask when you feel ready.

What is a colostomy?

A colostomy is a type of stoma which means mouth or opening. It is formed by bringing the colon out and stitching it onto the surface of the abdomen. This allows faeces to pass into a specialised appliance or pouch which is worn over the stoma.

It is usually moist and is pinkish-red in colour like the inside of your mouth. It is usually positioned on the left side of your abdomen and is quite flat. It is swollen at first after the operation and it can take up to 8 weeks for the swelling to go down. There are no nerve endings in the stoma so it is not painful. It is normal for the stoma to bleed a little when cleaned.

How Does the Stoma Function?

The stoma output is often very loose in the early days after surgery. Once established, the output varies from a formed to a semiformed-like consistency. The output cannot be controlled as there are no muscles to prevent it from working. In general the stoma pouch is changed two or maybe three times a day when about a third full.

How do I Empty and Change the Stoma Pouch?

The Specialist Nurses and ward staff will teach you how to empty and change your stoma pouch. Someone else can be taught if you need help or are unable.

The contents are then disposed of in the toilet and the pouches and wipes go into a disposal bag then into your usual rubbish bin. The pouch is odour-proof and has a filter to deodorise and allow wind to escape which also helps to prevent it from ballooning up. You will also be offered a choice of pouches to try.

Alternative ways of managing your colostomy will be discussed with you by your specialist nurse either before or after your colostomy formation.

Are there any Risks or Complications?

As with all surgery there are risks associated with stoma formation. Most stoma related issues can be managed without the need for further surgery.

Skin problems associated with leakage of faeces onto the skin can usually be managed by the Colorectal Nurse Specialist. People with existing skin conditions like eczema or psoriasis are more prone to skin problems around a stoma so a dermatologist may be consulted.

Studies have shown that around half of people with a colostomy will develop a hernia causing a bulge to develop around the stoma. The risk increases with age and is more common in people with larger stomas. Some hernias can cause aching or dragging abdominal discomfort and affect clothing choices. They are often managed with support garments however corrective surgery can also be an option.

How do I obtain Stoma Equipment?

All the stoma equipment you will need along with a holdall to store everything in will be provided for you whilst you are in hospital. You will be shown how to order your stoma equipment through a Delivery Company or local Chemist and how to obtain ongoing supplies after you go home.

All the equipment is available on prescription and if your stoma is permanent you will be exempt from paying prescription charges. Otherwise your prescription options will be discussed with you.

Going Home

When you can manage the stoma and you are medically fit to go home the Specialist Nurse will provide essential equipment, discharge information and a stoma clinic appointment. You should contact the Specialist Nurse after discharge if you have any unexpected problems.

Adapting to Life with a Stoma

Naturally it takes time to adapt after having a stoma but some people have difficulty coming to terms with this. Even with the preparation before your surgery you may feel you are not coping with stoma, it is affecting your relationships or limiting your social activities. If so then please contact your Specialist Nurse as she has experience of these issues and can provide many additional sources of support.

Stoma Clinics

The Specialist Nurse will arrange to see you in the Stoma Clinic within two weeks of your discharge from hospital and again at six weeks. At this appointment she will check your progress, review your stoma and order any equipment you need. After this you are free to contact the Specialist Nurse for a stoma clinic appointment if you have any stoma problems or need to discuss any related issues.

University Hospital Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust:

Colorectal Nurse Specialist Teams (24 hour answerphone)
Heartlands/Solihull Hospitals Telephone: 0121 424 2730
Good Hope Hospital Telephone: 0121 424 7429
Queen Elizabeth Hospital Telephone: 0121 371 4501   Email: colorectalnursingcns@uhb.nhs.uk

Follow us on Twitter @uhbcolorectal

Further sources of information:

Colostomy UK
Helpline open 24 hours a day: 0800 328 4257
hello@colostomyuk.org
www.colostomyuk.org

Additional Sources of Information and Support

NHS Choices www.nhs.uk/choices online information about colostomy surgery
Colostomy Association 0800 3284257 www.colostomyassociation.org.uk

If you require this information in another format, such as a different language, large print, braille or audio version please ask a member of staff or email patientexperience@uhb.nhs.uk.