Patient Information

University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust

## Nutrition and Dietetics

# Dietary advice for people with an ileostomy

A leaflet designed to give you, your family and friends dietary information and helpful tips on foods to eat; now you have an ileostomy.

## What is an ileostomy?

An ileostomy is a surgically created opening in the tummy wall where part of your small bowel (ileum) is brought to the surface. This procedure allows the waste products of digestion – such as poo (faeces) to leave your body without passing through the large bowel. The poo goes into a stoma bag attached to your skin, we refer to this as your "output".

## After the operation

Having an ileostomy should not prevent you from having a varied diet. However, it is recommended that you introduce foods gradually as it takes several weeks for your body to get used to it.

The change to your large bowel means you absorb less water and salt. This means you are more likely to have loose poos (stools) and a higher output in your bag (like diarrhoea). However, with time, your body will get used to it and absorb more water and salt so your ileostomy output will become thicker.

- Aim to drink at least 1.5 - 2 litres / 3 pints of fluid each day
- Add extra salt to your meals

It is important to eat well while you are healing and recovering. Your appetite is likely to be smaller and may take a while to return. Try to:

- Eat little and often. Aim for 5 to 6 small meals and snacks per day
- Take your time and chew your food well to prevent blockages. Soft, moist foods may be easier to chew

Include protein and energy foods at each meal.

- Protein foods - meat, poultry, eggs, yoghurt, milk, cheese, soya & tofu
- Energy foods - white bread, low fibre cereals, white pasta, potatoes without skins & white rice

Avoid spicy, fried, and fibrous foods (such as nuts, pith, raw vegetables, mushrooms, coconut, seeds, skins on fruits and vegetables, salad, celery, pineapple, pips, peas, sweetcorn, dried fruit and mango). You can start introducing these foods into your diet a little later on.

Everyone is different, and the diet that works for someone else might not work for you.

## After your ileostomy

As your body recovers from the operation, the smell and quantity of the output starts to reduce. Usually this is over a period of four to eight weeks. Once your output settles you will start to feel more confident to experiment with food and many people find they can enjoy the freedom of a full and varied diet. You should start to reintroduce foods to your tolerance, aiming for a healthy diet.

Continue to drink plenty of fluids and chew foods well to prevent potential blockages.

## A healthy diet

The Eatwell Guide (on the next page) shows how much you should aim to eat from each food group. This includes everything you eat during the day,

including snacks.

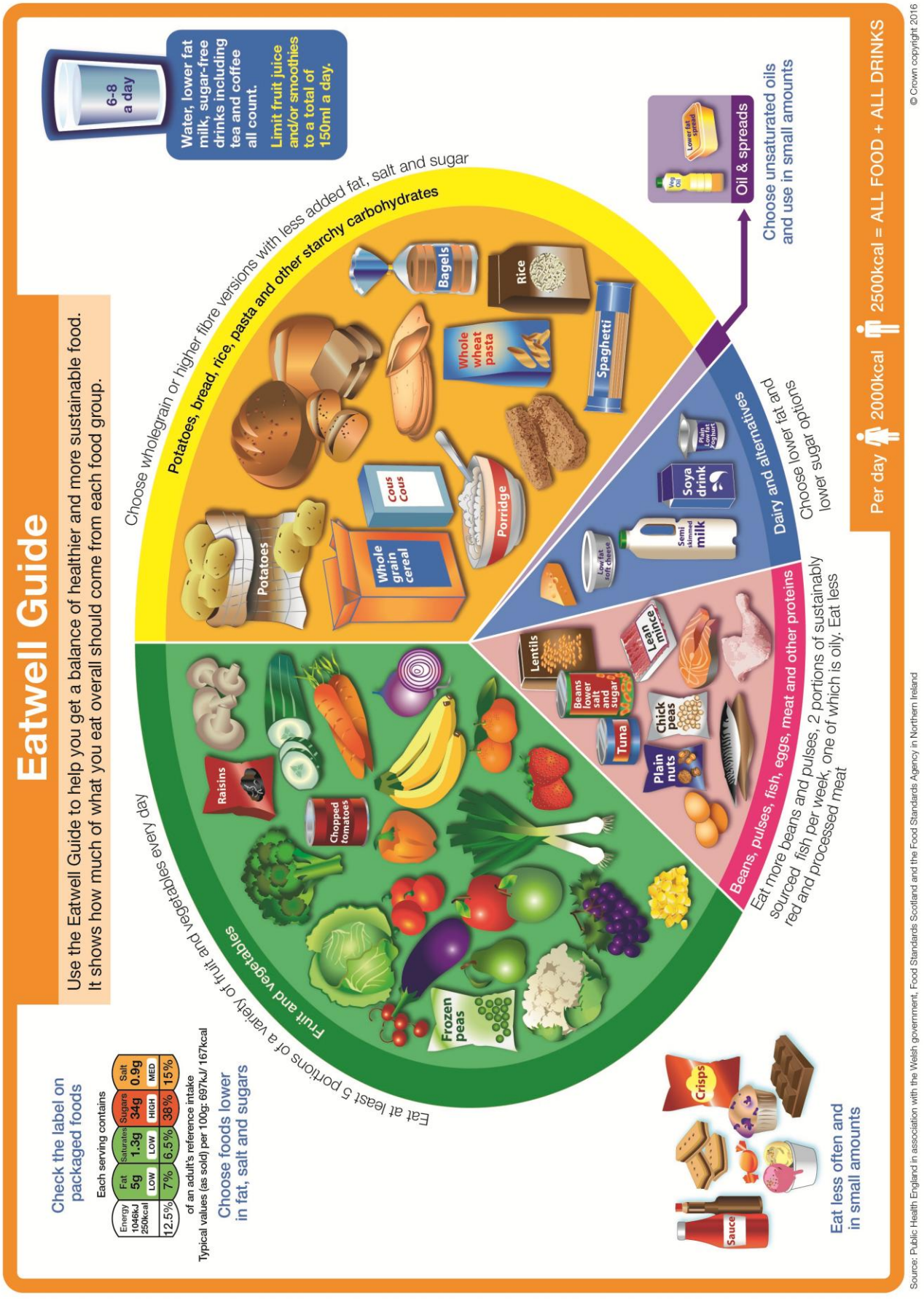
## Aim to eat:

- plenty of fruit and vegetables – 5 portions a day (2 tablespoons of vegetables, 1 piece of a larger fruit such as apple or banana, 2 pieces of a smaller fruit such as plums, 150ml of fruit juice or 2 tablespoons of stewed/tinned fruit)
- plenty of bread, rice, potatoes, pasta, and other starchy foods, choose wholegrain varieties whenever you can
- some milk and dairy foods
- some meat, fish, eggs, beans, and other non-dairy sources of protein such as lentils, beans, and pulses
- a small number of foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar such as oils, butter, cakes or biscuits
- a moderate salt intake (less than 6g per day)

# Meal pattern

Your meal pattern will be individual to you and your family or circumstances.

- Try to develop a regular eating pattern that helps your ileostomy function.
- Aim to eat meals in a relaxed environment.
- Smaller meals may suit you better, but it is important to eat more often so that you are eating enough calories. Late evening meals may increase ileostomy output during the night, some people may choose to eat earlier in the day or have a smaller evening meal.


Eatwell Guide
Use the Eatwell Guide to help you get a balance of healthier and more sustainable food. It shows how much of what you eat overall should come from each food group.
Per day 2000kcal 2500kcal = ALL FOOD + ALL DRINKS
6-8 a day
Water, lower fat milk, sugar-free drinks including tea and coffee all count.
Limit fruit juice and/or smoothies to a total of 150ml a day.
Choose wholegrain or higher fibre versions with less added fat, salt and sugar
Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates
Potatoes
Whole grain cereal
Cous Cous
Porridge
Bagels
Whole wheat pasta
Rice
Spaghetti
Oil & spreads
Choose unsaturated oils and use in small amounts
Dairy and alternatives
Choose lower fat and lower sugar options
Low fat soft cheese
Semi skimmed milk
Soya drink
Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins
Eat more beans and pulses, 2 portions of sustainably sourced fish per week, one of which is oily. Eat less red and processed meat
Lentils
Beans lower salt and sugar
Tuna
Chick peas
Plain nuts
Lean mince
Fruit and vegetables
Eat at least 5 portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables every day
Raisins
Chopped tomatoes
Frozen peas
Eat less often and in small amounts
Crisps
Sauce
Check the label on packaged foods
Each serving contains
Energy 1046kJ 250kcal 12.5%
Fat 5g LOW 7%
Saturates 1.3g LOW 6.5%
Sugars 34g HIGH 38%
Salt 0.9g MED 15%
of an adult's reference intake
Typical values (as sold) per 100g: 697kJ/ 167kcal
Choose foods lower in fat, salt and sugars
Source: Public Health England in association with the Welsh government, Food Standards Scotland and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland
© Crown copyright 2016

## Foods and their effects

There are no foods that you should avoid but some foods are linked with certain symptoms. Initially while your body adapts and you become more confident, you may prefer to try them when you are in a safe environment.

| Symptom | Possible causes | Practical tips |
|---|---|---|
| Farting (Flatulence or wind) | • Baked beans, lentils, peas, onions, garlic & fizzy drinks<br>• Eating at irregular times of the day and gulping your food can also result in wind | • Avoid fibre-rich or spicy foods<br>• Fizzy drinks can be better tolerated if left for 5 minutes and stirred<br>• Try to eat slower, and chew carefully<br>• Avoid chewing gum and drinking through a straw<br>• Establish regular meal pattern at set times in the day |
| Increased smell | • Onions, garlic, brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, beans, fish and eggs | • Peppermint oil capsules and yogurt can help mask the smell |
| Increased output | • Eating late in the evening may increase nighttime output | • Try to eat less of these foods to decrease output, but do not cut them all together: fried foods, spicy foods, alcohol, drinks that contain caffeine, high fibre foods (such as wholegrain cereals, nuts, pulses, raw fruit & vegetables)<br>• Try eating earlier and |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | avoid eating close to bedtime<br>• Banana, bread, rice pasta and food containing gelatine (such as marshmallow) may help to thicken output |

Everyone is different and what upsets one person may be fine for another. Try all foods and only avoid those which repeatedly cause you problems. It's important to remember that your tolerance will change over time, so retry problem foods when you feel ready.

## Diarrhoea (loose poo or excessive output)

If you continue to have diarrhoea or if it returns in the future, you will need to increase your intake of salt and fluid.

- Add salt to meals. Try and include salty foods such as soup, hard cheeses, crisps, savoury biscuits, ready meals, sauces, Oxo cubes or Bovril.
- Drink at least 8 cups of fluid every day. Aim to replace the fluid losses from the bag. Rehydration solutions are available from your chemist or on prescription (for example Diarolyte or Glucodrate) if required.
- Spicy foods and alcohol can upset your tummy and cause diarrhoea. Try to eat less of these when you do not feel well and find out how much you can tolerate.
- Drinks that contain caffeine such as cola, coffee and strong tea may also make symptoms worse. Try having weak tea, herbal tea, hot chocolate, or decaffeinated tea or coffee.

It's important to remember that food is not always to blame for symptoms. Diarrhoea may be the result of a stomach bug, medication, stress, or emotional upset.

**Seek medical advice if diarrhoea continues (output of consistently more than 1 litre) and/or you develop signs of dehydration.**

Signs of dehydration include:

- Dry mouth, lips, tongue
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- Feeling thirsty
- Feeling tired
- Peeing less often
- Strong smelling pee with dark yellow colour
- Sunken eyes

## Blockages

Chewing your food thoroughly, adding a sauce or sipping small amounts of a drink whilst eating should help your body to breakdown and digest your food.

Undigested food can temporarily block your ileostomy. If this happens you may feel sick, bloated or be sick (vomit). Your output may slow down or stop.

If your output stops, lie down and rest, drink plenty of water and stop eating. If symptoms persist for more than 6 to 8 hours, consult your bowel care specialist nurse or your GP.

## Useful contacts

| | |
|---|---|
| Bowel Cancer UK | 020 7940 1760<br>www.bowelcanceruk.org.uk |
| Colostomy Association | Free phone: 0800 3284257<br>www.colostomyassociation.org.uk |
| GUTS UK Charity | 0207 4860341<br>https://gutscharity.org.uk/ |
| NHS - Eat well | https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well |
| Ileostomy and Internal Pouch Support Group | Free phone: 0800 0184 724<br>www.iasupport.org |
| Macmillan Cancer Support | Free phone 0808 808 0000<br>www.macmillan.org.uk |

| | |
|---|---|
| Crohn's & Colitis UK | 01727830038<br>https://crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/ |

**For more information and support contact:**

| | |
|---|---|
| Bowel Care Specialist Nurses | 024 7696 5616<br>024 7696 5617 |
| Coventry Dietitians | 024 7696 6161 |

"Eatwell Guide" contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, please contact the Nutrition and Dietetic Department on 024 7696 6161 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy.

## Did we get it right?

We would like you to tell us what you think about our services. This helps us make further improvements and recognise members of staff who provide a good service.

Have your say. Scan the QR code or visit:
www.uhcw.nhs.uk/feedback


| **Document History** | |
|---|---|
| Department: | Nutrition & Dietetics |
| Contact: | 26161 |
| Updated: | August 2025 |
| Review: | August 2027 |
| Version: | 9 |
| Reference: | HIC/LFT/162/06 |