



The ileostomy & internal pouch  
**Support Group**

## Introducing you to your ileostomy

### Introduction

You have probably had your ileostomy operation because your large intestine (colon) was no longer working properly; your operation was done to improve your health.

The main function of your colon was to re-absorb water from your body's natural waste products and to produce a dry, firm, compact stool; no doubt you were all too familiar with the diarrhoea and other symptoms which occurred when your colon failed to work properly.

Digestion of food and the absorption of the nutrients in the food takes place before the waste products are passed on to the colon. Your digestive tract above your new outlet is just the same as it was before your operation and the part of your ileum (small intestine) that now forms the outlet has always been a natural part of you, even though you could not see it. (The outlet is known medically as a *stoma* – from the Greek word for mouth – but is often referred to in general use as an ostomy).

Apart from the general improvement in your health which can be anticipated, there will be two main differences in your everyday life now that you have an ileostomy.

Everyone's ileum produces waste products in semi-fluid form and this will be quite normal for you, as you do not now have a colon to re-absorb the water content. You will almost certainly find that your body compensates by making you feel thirstier to increase your body fluid intake.

Your stoma does not have any muscle, so you will not be able to control it. You will not be able to retain your waste products until a socially convenient time.

Your stoma may work at irregular intervals, particularly in the early days while your body is re-adjusting after your operation, so you will always need to wear an ileostomy bag.

### Ileostomy Bags

.....are usually held on to the skin of the abdomen by an adhesive patch of about 75mm to 100mm, which may be square, oval or circular. The bag fits over the stoma and the output goes into it. The bags are usually drainable, which means they have an outlet which can be opened and securely re-sealed as often as necessary to allow emptying without having to change the whole system each time.

Occasionally you will have to change the whole system, though the interval between these changes will vary, depending on which system is used; experience will show the best period between changes for you. As time passes and you return to regular eating habits, you will begin to know when your stoma is likely to be least active so you can judge when to change bags or to shower/bath without wearing a bag if you wish.

### The future

Nowadays, a straightforward ileostomy is not a handicap thanks to the latest surgical techniques, medical aftercare, modern ostomy equipment and the collective experience of others. You have exchanged the misery and pain of uncontrollable illness and diarrhoea for better health with only a minor, but controllable, inconvenience. I hope that, like the 20,000 or so other people in this country, you will soon become master of your ileostomy and realise that this inconvenience is a very small price to pay for a new, full life.

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