



Exercising with a stoma

Every move counts

Move more and reduce your sedentary time each day by incorporating different types of movement. It is never too late to start, some is always better than none!

How to get started

Regular exercise will help you reduce the risks of heart disease, some cancers, type 2 diabetes, obesity, hypertension, stroke and osteoporosis. It can also help prevent postoperative weight gain, help reduce constipation and ease radiation-related fatigue if applicable. Regular exercise also helps improve skin quality tone, body shape, posture and helps you regain your stamina and energy. It also significantly reduces depression, anxiety and helps boost self-esteem and self-confidence.

If possible, start walking daily after your surgery. Walking stimulates the return of bowel function and helps you regain muscle and stamina lost while in hospital.

Whatever sports you may have played in the past, you can enjoy them again with few exceptions.

Swimming is an excellent exercise and provides opportunities for stretching and relaxation. For women, a one piece swimsuit with detail or patterns may give extra discretion and privacy if required; swimwear with a panel across the stomach will offer greater support. For men, swimming trunks made of a lycra or spandex-type material worn underneath swim shorts will help hold a stoma bag in place and provide extra comfort. Eat and drink lightly and empty your pouch before you swim and ensure you take spare stoma care products with you.

Discuss with your doctor or healthcare professional the best exercise plan for you.

Take all medicines as recommended by your doctor or pharmacist.

Warm up and cool down

Always start your exercise session with a 10–15-minute warm up to loosen up the muscles and raise the heart rate safely. Warm-up exercises include dynamic stretches, range-of-motion activities and low intensity movements. This can be done standing up, walking around, marching on the spot or seated.

Always end your exercise session with a 10–15-minute cool-down to ensure your heart rate and breathing rate return to normal safely. Cool down exercises include slowly decreasing the intensity of your activity and simple stretches.

Be active

Some is good, more is better

How much:	Aim for at least 150-300 minutes a week of moderate intensity or at least 75-150 minutes a week of vigorous intensity physical activity. Start moving more each day increasing to regular movement every day and add sessions as your strength and stamina improve.
How hard:	Any movement helps. Start with low to moderate intensity—aim to get slightly breathless. Once you are comfortable exercising at this level, aim for moderate to vigorous intensity. Take frequent breaks, if necessary.

How long:	Aim to spread out your session throughout the week. If your fitness level is low, start with 5–10-minute sessions and add 10-minute intervals until you can comfortably exercise for longer.
What type:	All physical activity counts. Try activities within your abilities: walking, cycling, jogging, dancing, swimming, water aerobics, hiking—choose something you enjoy! Recreational team sports such as soccer, tennis, or volleyball are great social activities too! Household activities such as cleaning, gardening, vacuuming or walking your dog are great activities for your health.

What will it do for me?

Regular exercise significantly improves overall cardiovascular health and helps promote a feeling of wellbeing. It also significantly reduces your risks of heart disease, hypertension, some cancers, stroke and obesity.

Build strength

How much:	At least twice a week.
How hard:	Start with light muscle strengthening exercises and progress to moderate or greater intensities over time.
How long:	Choose 8–10 exercises targeting the upper and lower body and repeat each exercise 10–15 times. Try 1–3 sets of each exercise.
What type:	A variety of strength exercises using free weights, resistance machines or household items such as a can of beans or a weighted water bottle as a weight. At home, try calf raises, wall push-ups, arm curls, knee curls, front and side arm raises, pelvic tilts, and chair stands. Household chores such as carrying shopping, mowing the lawn or gardening are also good strength-building exercises.

What will it do for me?

Strength training maintains bone health and improves muscle strength and helps your ability to do more in the day. Bowel surgery and certain gastrointestinal diseases may increase the risk of osteoporosis.

Improve balance

How much:	Three days a week. Start with one session per week, and gradually work towards three.
How hard:	Try 2–3 balance exercises and repeat each exercise 10–15 times. Do 2 sets of each exercise.
How long:	Hold each balance for 10–30 seconds.
What type:	Try yoga, Tai Chi or home balance exercises. Always exercise safely when doing balance exercises. If you are at high risk of falling, do seated balance exercises or exercise using a sturdy chair or wall for support.

What will it do for me?

Practicing balance exercises helps to train your body to react more quickly to a loss of balance and can help reduce the risk of falls, fractures and injuries.



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Sedentary living

Reduce the amount of time being sedentary. Move more and break up sedentary time. Sedentary behavior is defined as time spent sitting or lying with low energy expenditure, while awake in the context of occupational, educational, home and community settings, and travel. Higher amounts of sedentary behavior can increase the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers.

Replace sedentary behavior with more physical activity of any intensity (including light intensity). It is possible to avoid sedentary behaviour and be physically active while sitting or lying, through, for example, upper body led activities, inclusive and/or wheelchair-specific sport and activities. Try seated stretches for those with limited mobility; using active forms of transport; standing while working (within your abilities and environment), and other accessible active options to replace sedentary time.

Your exercise, your way!

Choose activities that are easy to start with, and that you enjoy. Always exercise within your abilities. If mobility is difficult, adapted cycling, swimming and chair-based exercises may be better alternatives. Exercise with friends and family or join a group class to improve your motivation levels and engage in social activities. Try exercising both indoors and outdoors and see which you prefer! Most importantly: **some physical activity is better than none.**

Resources

The GoHere Washroom Locator App helps people find the closest available washroom, anywhere in Canada. Learn more here. <https://crohnsandcolitis.ca/Support-for-You/GoHere-Washroom-Access>

Visit the Ostomy Canada Society to learn more about resuming physical activity with a stoma. <https://www.ostomycanada.ca/wellness-and-fitness/>

Ostomy Canada Society provides tips for living with a stoma from frequently asked questions. <https://www.ostomycanada.ca/living-with-an-ostomy/#>

Exercise safety

Remember to always check with your doctor, surgeon or stoma nurse before you start exercising. Following your operation, avoid heavy lifting for 12 weeks and stop any exercise if it hurts!

Healthcare provider permission is recommended for patients with an ostomy/ stoma before participation in contact sports (risk of blow) and weight training (risk of hernia).

Before exercising, plan to manage any changes in symptoms such as diarrhea by tailoring your diet and exercise routine accordingly.

Ensure you are well hydrated and eat a balance of protein and carbohydrates in small meals throughout the day.

Avoid extreme changes in body temperature during exercise.

Rest if you feel tired, especially if you experience diarrhea or ostomy discharge.

Stop your exercise program if you have a hernia or an ostomy-related systemic infection. Stomas are reasonably hardy, but some common sense rules apply. You may want to wear a hernia belt as a precaution while engaging in strenuous sports.

Start with shorter sessions (e.g. 10–15 minutes) and slowly build up to the recommended level.

Aim to get slightly out of breath, but exercise sensibly and stop the activity if you feel unwell.

Always wear comfortable clothing and shoes that give good support. Take frequent breaks if necessary and drink water before, during and after exercise. Hydration is especially important for those with an ileostomy.

Ensure you exercise safely during all exercises and ask for assistance if you are unsure about any exercises.

Choose environments that you can access freely and safely. Opt for places with appropriate facilities and rest stops if required. Please ask your healthcare provider or local leisure organizations for advice on the best option for you.



Scan for more
physical activity
resources!

