Stoma care for babies with a colostomy or ileostomy

This leaflet is for parents or carers and explains more about how to care for your baby’s stoma. If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for your baby.

What is a stoma?

A stoma is an opening in the body created after an operation. It joins parts of the internal organs to the outside of the body. The most common stomas in newborns are ileostomies and colostomies.

An ileostomy is where the small bowel (small intestine) is diverted through an opening in the tummy (abdomen).

A colostomy is where the large intestine (colon) is diverted through an opening in the tummy (abdomen).

A stoma should be pink or red in colour, warm to touch, moist and shiny. The skin surrounding the stoma should be intact and should not be sore or discoloured.

Stomas are all different in shape and size.

Following surgery your baby may have more than one stoma, which may be close together or apart. There will be a surgical reason for this.

The stomas are covered with paraffin gauze following surgery to keep them moist and prevent them from drying out.

One of the stomas will be what is called the functioning stoma and will need to be covered with a bag in order to collect the poo (effluent).

The other stoma, known as the mucous fistula, does not necessarily need to be covered with a bag in the same way, as there should only be a small amount of mucus coming from it. If the mucous fistula is in a place away from the functioning stoma it will probably be left uncovered.

What are stoma bags?

Stoma bags collect the effluent and protect the skin.

There are two main types of stoma bag for newborns: a one piece bag and a two piece bag.

The one piece bag has an adhesive integral flange which is used to attach to your baby’s skin. Nothing else should be put onto the skin except specially designed stoma products such as powder, paste or pieces of hydrocolloid.
A two piece bag has an adhesive base plate in addition to the bag, and should always be used with both sections. The bag should never be stuck directly onto the skin.

The type of bag depends on the size of your baby, the size and type of the stoma and the quantity of effluent. Stoma care is the same for all types of bag.
How do I care for my baby’s stoma?

After your baby’s operation, a special stoma care nurse will supply the right equipment and show you how to care for your baby’s stoma.

When you are ready you can help with this in hospital and get ready to care for your baby’s stoma at home. The nursing staff and stoma care nurse will answer any questions that you have.

If effluent comes into contact with your baby’s skin it will make it red and sore. To stop this, the skin around the stoma must be completely covered by the flange or base plate.

The stoma care nurse will show you how to make a template to use to cut the flange or base plate into the right size and shape to make sure it fits snugly around the stoma. This must be used every time.

The template should be dated to show when it was last cut as stomas change shape and size over time (see the pictures below). Curved scissors should be used.

Dated template

Cutting template

Two piece bag and base plates with the correct and incorrect position for holes to be cut
How do I change my baby's stoma bag?

Your baby's stoma bag will need to be emptied every 3 or 4 hours, when your baby is due a nappy change.

The stoma bag is usually changed every 1-3 days.

Get all the equipment ready before you start to make sure things run smoothly.

**Equipment you will need**

- Bowl of warm tap water
- Soft wipes or kitchen roll
- New stoma bag, cut to size using the saved template
- Adhesive remover (spray or wipes)
- Skin protector wipes
- Rubbish bag
- Clothes peg to secure clothing, if needed.

**How to change the stoma bag**

- Empty the bag
- Remove the bag using adhesive remover spray or wipes
- Clean skin around the stoma with moistened soft wipe, not cotton wool balls (the stoma may bleed a little during cleaning but this is quite normal)
- Dry skin well with a dry soft wipe
- Apply skin protector wipe and allow 30-40 seconds to dry
- Apply other special products, e.g. powder, paste or a piece of hydrocolloid, as advised by the stoma care nurse
- Remove the backing from the flange or base plate and apply the bag or base plate to the skin
- Apply the bag to the base plate if you are using the two piece system
- There will either be Velcro, a tap or a soft tie at the bottom of the bag – make sure this is closed
- Put all waste into the rubbish bag, tie handles and dispose.

The rubbish bag should be put in the clinical waste bin if you are in hospital, or your household rubbish bin at home.

**How to position the stoma bag**

It is good to place the bag at a 45 degree angle to the stoma to help with drainage. This is the angle made by the hands of a clock at 2 o'clock or 10 o'clock.

You can try different angles to find the best place for drainage, bag emptying and a comfortable nappy.

Sometimes your baby will have a hernia (bulge) around the stoma or the stoma will prolapse (get longer). This is nothing to worry about and the stoma care nurse will show you how to care for the stoma if this happens.
One piece stoma bag placed to aid drainage
Notice the close fit of the stoma bag around the stoma

Stoma bag inside nappy

How to remove the stoma bag
When removing a stoma bag, medical adhesive spray or adhesive removal wipes must be used to stop any pain or stripping of the skin. You should check the underside of the flange or base plate to see if effluent has seeped over it, which shows that the bag should be changed more often or extra products need to be used. Also check the skin around the stoma for redness and soreness which might mean the template needs to be changed for the next bag you cut.
What extra products can I use to care for my baby's stoma?

**Skin Protector**
This helps to protect the skin around a stoma and prevents soreness. It contains no alcohol which makes it very safe to use but also means you must wait for 30-40 seconds for it to dry before applying the bag. Other types of skin barriers such as creams and lotions should not be used unless asked to do by the stoma care nurse as they may stop the bag from sticking properly.

**Powder**
Stoma powder is used to heal moist red skin around the stoma. It is sprinkled onto the skin around the stoma and will help the broken skin to heal. The powder should be sprinkled lightly over the area and then any extra brushed off. Too much powder will stop the bag from sticking properly.

**Hydrocolloid washers or rings**
Hydrocolloid is a soft substance which is used to protect the skin, fill in gaps and creases and help to stop leakage. Hydrocolloid washers, rings or shaped pieces can also flatten creased and scarred skin around stomas and help broken skin to heal.

**Paste**
Special pastes can protect and heal skin, fill creases and dips and help the flange or base plate to stick properly. Only a little paste should be used because some contain alcohol, which can sting sore skin.

The stoma care nurse will help with putting these products on your baby the first few times.

How do I get more stoma bags?

While your baby is in hospital, the stoma care nurse will supply everything your baby needs for the stoma. If your baby goes home with the stoma, the stoma care nurse will tell you how to get more equipment.

After my baby leaves hospital

If your baby goes home with the stoma, a stoma care nurse will come to your house and see your baby at home. When your baby is ready, you might be asked to take your baby to see the stoma care nurse in your local hospital. You will be given the contact details of the stoma care nurse and will be able to ask questions and talk about anything that concerns you.

You will be sent an appointment to see the doctor in the hospital to talk about closing your baby’s stoma.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about caring for your baby’s stoma, please contact your local stoma care nurse or the stoma care department at St George's on 020 8725 3916 (24 hour answerphone) or contact the St George’s Hospital switchboard on 020 8672 1255 and ask for bleep 7006 (Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 4:00pm).

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk
Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)
PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer).
Tel: 020 8725 2453  Email: pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices
NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.  Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111
You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it’s not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.
Tel: 111

Notes