

# Staying Healthy After Bowel Cancer

There are several steps that you can take to help you stay healthy after bowel cancer and this factsheet will briefly outline these. If you have any questions regarding this or any other aspect of bowel cancer, please call our **Bowel Cancer Advisory Service on freephone 0800 8 40 35 40**.

## Eat Healthily

After bowel surgery, you should aim to eat a balanced diet. However, many people experience a change in the way their digestive system works. You may not be comfortable eating certain foods any more, in which case you may wish to try reintroducing them into your diet gradually.

If your stools continue to be loose, your GP can prescribe medication to make them firmer and reduce the number of times you have to pass a motion. Your GP can refer you to a community dietician if you request help, or you could speak to one at the hospital before you leave.

Our factsheet Eating after Bowel Surgery gives more detailed advice.

## Stay Fit

Try to take regular exercise as part of your daily routine but start gently, bearing in mind the treatment you have had. If you are still undergoing chemotherapy or radiotherapy, there are times when doing exercise could do more harm than good. We recommend you always consult your doctor or nurse before starting any exercise regime. Driving is not advisable for up to 6 weeks after surgery; again your doctor will be able to advise you further.

## Go for Follow-Up Checks

There is no set follow-up regime and each consultant/hospital has its own post-surgery timetable. You will usually have a follow-up appointment at the hospital around 6 weeks after surgery. Recent studies have shown that there is little difference in relapse rates in patients who are vigorously followed up compared to those who are seen less often or who have fewer invasive tests.

You can expect to have blood tests, and a colonoscopy is usually carried out 1 year post-operatively. The frequency and type of follow-up can depend on whether you are having further treatment, for example chemotherapy or radiotherapy. CT scans will be carried out to monitor your response to the treatment.

If you feel unwell in any way do not hesitate to contact your GP. Your GP should be contacted urgently especially if you have:

- Severe abdominal /shoulder pain
- High temperature (shivering/fever)
- Persistent nausea/vomiting
- Swelling, redness, pain and discharge from the wound



## Be Aware of Your Body

After a diagnosis of bowel cancer you will, understandably, be intensely aware of changes in your body. Like everyone, you may still get common ailments that make you feel off-colour, such as tummy upsets, colds and 'flu.

If you experience changes that you cannot explain or changes that persist or recur, go and talk to your doctor without delay. Do not ignore symptoms such as digestive problems, pain, a feeling of weakness or exhaustion, unexplained loss of appetite, weight loss or gain, frequent headaches, jaundice (yellowing skin) or a persistent cough.

## Get the Support You Need

In the rush to deal with physical problems, it is sometimes easier to push emotional issues to the sidelines. If you or your family have questions you would like to talk through, there are a variety of organisations that can help. Our **Bowel Cancer Advisory Service** is staffed by specialist nurses able to signpost these and provide support for you.

## Further Sources of Help

### Colostomy Association

The Colostomy Association provide information, advice and support following a colostomy (stoma) operation.

Helpline: 0800 587 6744 or 0800 328 4257

Email: [cass@colostomyassociation.org.uk](mailto:cass@colostomyassociation.org.uk)

[www.colostomyassociation.org.uk](http://www.colostomyassociation.org.uk)

### Macmillan Cancer Support

Macmillan Cancer Support provides specialist information and support for people with cancer at every stage of their illness. They provide assistance on a range of cancer-related topics including benefits advice and patient grants, treatment information, practical help at home and information about which organisations exist to support patients, such as respite centres or specialist palliative care hospices.

Cancerline available 9am -10pm: 0808 808 2020

[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

email: [cancerline@macmillan.org.uk](mailto:cancerline@macmillan.org.uk)

### The Ileostomy and Internal Pouch Support Group

The Ileostomy and Internal Pouch Support Group provide information and help for people who have had surgery to remove the bowel.

Tel: 0800 0184 724

[www.the-ia.org.uk](http://www.the-ia.org.uk)

email: [info@the-ia.org.uk](mailto:info@the-ia.org.uk)

### The Cancer Counselling Trust

The Cancer Counselling Trust offers free, face to face counselling in London and telephone counselling across the UK. They work with cancer patients, their families, friends and carers.

Tel: 020 7843 2292

Email: [support@cctrust.org.uk](mailto:support@cctrust.org.uk)

[www.cancercounselling.org.uk](http://www.cancercounselling.org.uk)

You may find the following additional factsheets helpful:

- Eating after Bowel Surgery
- Going Home

Information correct as at date of publication (March 2009)

For further information contact the Bowel Cancer Advisory Service on: (Freephone) 0800 8 40 35 40

Email: [advisory@bowelcanceruk.org.uk](mailto:advisory@bowelcanceruk.org.uk)

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