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Eating and drinking when you have a high stoma output

First line advice

Introduction

This leaflet provides advice on ways to reduce your stoma output. If you have any queries or concerns then please ask your doctor or stoma nurse for advice.

What is a high stoma output?

When your large bowel (colon) is removed, the small bowel is not as efficient at absorbing fluid and you may experience a high output from your stoma. If your output is high and you are losing more than 1500ml per day from your stoma, you are at greater risk of becoming dehydrated. However over time your small bowel (ileum) is usually able to adapt to maintain hydration.

A high stoma output may occur if:

- Your stoma is newly formed
- Your bowel is affected by disease or treatment
- Your bowel is shortened by formation of a temporary stoma (for example after pouch formation)

How would I recognise dehydration?

If you are dehydrated you may experience:

- Dry, sticky mouth
- Increased thirst
- Light headedness or feeling dizzy especially when going from sitting to standing
- Tiredness
- Headache
- Passing less urine which is dark or strong smelling
- Muscle cramps

The colour of your urine is a good guide to see how well hydrated you are. A clear, pale yellow colour suggests good hydration whereas a more concentrated, dark yellow colour may indicate you are getting dehydrated. Please check the colour of your urine every day.

What should I do if I get dehydrated?

If you are experiencing any of the symptoms above and feel dehydrated please contact the Stoma Care department or your GP for further advice.

Guidance on how to reduce your stoma output

Your stoma output may be reduced by:

- Drinking less fluid and replacing it with an oral rehydration solution (such as the St Mark's electrolyte mix detailed below)
- Increasing your salt intake
- Reducing your fibre intake
- Taking medication to reduce your output

What should I drink to reduce my output?

Drinking too much ordinary fluid will increase your stoma output and make you become more thirsty and dehydrated.

You can reduce your output by:

- Limiting the amount of ordinary fluids that you drink (for example fruit juice, squash, fizzy drinks, water, tea or coffee) to about 1 litre (about 6 cups per day)
- Drinking a rehydration solution like St Mark's electrolyte mix to help your body absorb fluid and salt.

What is St Mark's electrolyte mix and how do I take it?

This is a specially formulated drink which is high in salt to help your body absorb fluid and reduce losses from your stoma.

The electrolyte mix needs to be made up freshly every day. To do this you need to measure out the following powders:

20g (six level 5ml spoonful) of Glucose

2.5g (one heaped 2.5ml spoonful) of Sodium Bicarbonate (baking soda)

3.5g (one level 5 ml spoonful) of Sodium Chloride (salt)

This needs to be dissolved in 1litre of cold tap water. It is recommended that you drink 1litre of the electrolyte mix each day.

You can buy the ingredients (powders) from any pharmacy and some supermarkets or you can obtain them on prescription from your GP. They are cheaper to buy than to get through a prescription if you pay prescription charges.

You may find the solution tastes salty. This can be improved by:

- Storing the drink in the refrigerator and taking it chilled. It can also be frozen and taken as a slush
- Sipping it through a straw
- Adding a small amount of squash, fruit juice or cordial to improve the taste. This is best added while making up the solution rather than adding to each glass so that the salt content remains high
- Adding fresh lemon or lime juice

When it is hot, we sweat and lose salt and fluid from the body. In this situation people with a high stoma output are more likely to get dehydrated and you may find you need to drink more electrolyte mix to replace these losses.

How can I increase my salt intake?

Each day you lose a lot of salt (sodium) from your stoma and it is important to try and replace these losses by following a diet high in salt.

You can increase your salt intake by:

- Using salt in cooking and adding salt to your meals
- Eating high salt foods like salty crisps, savoury biscuits and crackers, cheese, bacon, ham, smoked or tinned fish, sauces (for example tomato ketchup or brown sauce)

How can I reduce my fibre intake?

Fibrous foods are difficult to digest and may increase your stoma output especially if eaten in large quantities or if not properly chewed. Reducing your fibre intake may help decrease your stoma output.

Ways to limit your fibre intake:

- Use white-based cereal products, for example white bread, white rice, white pasta, Cornflakes or Rice Krispies.
- Choose small portions of fruit and vegetables and remove skins, stalks, seed and pips
- Avoid nuts and dried fruit
- Limit your intake of pulses (beans, chickpeas or lentils) unless you are vegetarian when you should include one portion a day for protein

When your stoma output settles, you may want to re-introduce some of these foods but start with small portions, well-cooked and chew them carefully.

Medications

You may be prescribed medications like loperamide or codeine phosphate to reduce your stoma output and these are best taken 30-60 minutes before food. You may also be prescribed anti-secretory medication such as omeprazole or ranitidine to reduce the amount of acid produced by your stomach.

What if I am losing weight?

- Choose protein foods like meat, fish, eggs, quorn or tofu at each meal
- Choose full fat dairy products such as full fat milk, cheese and yoghurts
- Eat starchy foods like bread, cereals, potatoes, rice or pasta at each meal
- If your appetite is poor, take smaller meals with regular snacks in between like crisps, biscuits, cakes, muffins, crumpets or scones with butter/margarine, crackers with cheese
- Fortify your meals: Add 4 tablespoons of skimmed milk powder to 1 pint of whole milk and use on cereals, puddings and beverages. Add margarine, butter or grated cheese to vegetables, potatoes and soups. Try adding custard, double cream or ice cream to puddings for extra energy

If you have a poor appetite, any difficulties with eating sufficient amounts of food or continue to lose weight then ask your doctor to refer you to a Dietitian.

For further information

This leaflet has been produced by staff in the Nutrition and Dietetics department in conjunction with the Stoma Care department of The London North West Healthcare NHS Trust. For more information call 020 8235 4110.