

## CARING FOR AN OSTOMY AND CHANGING OSTOMY BAGS



An ostomy is created surgically as part of a treatment for a bowel or bladder disease and allows elimination of body waste through a different route. Having an ostomy may be more challenging than other wounds because it can create worries about how the new appliance will affect the person's life.

Although the terms **ostomy** and **stoma** are often used interchangeably, they have different meanings. An **ostomy** refers to the surgically created opening in the body for the discharge of body wastes. A **stoma** is the actual end of the ureter or small or large bowel that can be seen protruding through the abdominal wall. The stoma is red and may vary in size or location. An ostomy may be temporary or permanent. A **wafer** or faceplate is the part of the ostomy appliance that sticks to the skin. It has adhesive on one side and the other side is connected to a pouch. Some ostomy systems have two parts—a wafer and a separate ostomy bag. Two-piece ostomy bags may be drainable or closed.

This video describes the process of changing an ostomy bag with an attached wafer. Learning how to do this confidently makes it easier for the person and caregiver to concentrate on other aspects of life after an ostomy.

### Supplies

The first step in changing an ostomy bag is having all the necessary supplies available. These include:

- > Mild soap and water or saline spray
- > Paper towels or a washcloth
- > Ostomy bag with attached wafer
- > Adhesive remover
- > Curved scissors
- > Marking pen
- > Stoma measuring guide
- > Zip-lock plastic bag for disposal
  - Do not put used ostomy bag directly in the garbage
- > Disposable gloves

### Costs

Ostomy supplies are covered by Medicare Part B, Medicaid, and most insurance plans if a health care provider certifies that they are “medically necessary.” There may be deductibles and copays and you may have to obtain them from a specific vendor. If you purchase ostomy supplies online, be sure to ask your health care provider exactly what is needed because there are many varieties to choose from.

### Steps in Changing an Ostomy Bag

1. Wash your hands thoroughly
2. Put on a fresh pair of disposable gloves
3. Use adhesive remover to loosen the old bag
4. Remove the old bag carefully
5. Place it in the zip-lock plastic bag for disposal
6. Cleanse the area around the stoma with tap water and pat dry
7. Measure the stoma with the guide to find the right size for the wafer
8. Using the curved scissors, cut the outlined opening on the wafer
9. Warm the wafer under your arm for about 30 seconds
10. Remove the sticker backing and apply the wafer to the skin
11. Remove your gloves and place in the disposal bag
12. Make sure all used materials are in the disposal bag
13. Wash hands again

## Tips to Remember

- > Empty the ostomy bag when it is one-third full. Release the Velcro tab or closure at the bottom and empty the contents into the toilet.
- > Change the ostomy bag every three to five days unless there is a problem.
- > Take showers but not tub baths.
- > Keep written notes for reference.

## Other Resources

- > The [United Ostomy Associations of America, Inc.](#) has information on different kinds of ostomies, support groups, travel tips, disaster preparedness, sexuality, swimming and other athletics, and other areas of interest to people with ostomies and their families. There is a [video](#) on living with an ostomy.
- > The [American Cancer Society](#) has information about ostomies linked to cancer treatment as well as other conditions and a list of other organizations working with people with ostomies and their families.
- > For veterans and caregivers of veterans, go to [www.caregiver.va.gov](http://www.caregiver.va.gov) or call 1-855-260-3274 for more information about resources and support.
- > The [Wound, Ostomy, and Continence Nurses Society](#) has resources for patients and caregivers, including how to find nurse experts.

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