**Navigating Intimacy After an Ostomy**

By Colleen L. Vining, RN, BSN

[cvining808@gmail.com](mailto:cvining808@gmail.com)

[www.vininghealthcontent.com](http://www.vininghealthcontent.com)

As a new ostomate, you have undoubtedly faced many challenges, treatments, side effects of treatments/medications and a new way of doing some things that used to be second nature. Although intimacy may not be the first thing you think about when adapting to your new circumstances, you may eventually want to resume or initiate intimate relations with your partner. This might seem overwhelming at first, but with the right information, planning, communication and support, an enjoyable sex life is possible.

Many people with ostomies may initially be concerned about how their ostomy will look and how an intimate partner feels about it. Communication is the most important factor in working through these issues. However, there are ways to cover the pouch during intimacy that may help you feel more confident and at ease.

* There are a variety of pouch covers (a onesie, dress, or negligee for your ostomy) and attractive belts meant to hold the ostomy against your body that can be worn alone or under clothing.
* Women can wear loose-fitting clothing such as a robe, long t-shirt, blouse, nightie, or even crotchless panties to cover the ostomy during intimate moments.
* Men can wear a cummerbund or attractive boxer shorts.

A concern of many ostomates is potential odors. There are many ways to help avoid this issue.

* Use an ostomy pouch with an integrated filter, which helps prevent odor and ballooning from gas.
* Add drop or tablet deodorizers into your pouch.
* Empty your pouch frequently (when it is 1/3 to 1/2 full). Use a room deodorizer after emptying.
* Clean your pouch regularly with mild soap and water and change your pouch system as necessary — on average, about twice per week.
* Watch your diet, as some foods can cause output to have a more unpleasant smell. It may help to keep a food diary to identify and avoid any foods that cause these odors.
* Stay hydrated to help dilute urine and feces, thereby reducing odor.
* Discuss any persistent or severe odor with your healthcare provider, as this could be a sign of infection.

You may be concerned about your pouch leaking. There are several ways to prevent this.

* Make sure your skin barrier fits properly by using a measuring guide before every application. Apply skin barrier to fit where the skin and stoma meet, ensuring no skin is showing between the barrier and the stoma.
* Change your pouch regularly — usually about twice a week.
* Empty your pouch just before intimate relations.
* Wear a support garment, belt or wrap to secure your pouch.
* Be especially careful when removing the skin barrier, as improper or rapid removal of the barrier can cause damage to your skin, leading to leaks and irritation.

You may wonder whether an ostomy will physically interfere with intimate relations. While you may need to make a few adjustments, having an ostomy does not need to hinder your ability to enjoy a fulfilling and satisfying sex life.

* Intimate contact and movement during sex will not hurt your stoma.
* Nothing should ever be put into the stoma, as it is not a sexual organ.
* Experiment with different positions to avoid pressure on your ostomy site and optimize your comfort. A side-lying position on the stoma side may work well, as the pouch can fall to the side and not come between you and your partner.
* Wear a support belt, crotchless panties, boxer shorts or use medical tape (designed for use on skin) to help hold the pouch in place and provide support during intimacy.
* Use lubrication as necessary to reduce irritation or discomfort.
* Take your time. Take a break if something doesn’t feel comfortable or right.

People of all gender identities and sexual orientations have ostomies. Closing of the anus or removal of the rectum may present concerns for some, so it is important to research and discuss other methods of expressing and experiencing intimacy.

It is essential to discuss with your partner your fears, expectations, likes, dislikes, anxieties and any other emotions you and your partner may have before resuming or starting intimate contact. This will help achieve a satisfying and fulfilling experience for both of you. And remember, giving and receiving pleasure can be expressed in many different ways. You may find some new and exciting ways to enjoy one another. So talk about it and have fun exploring together.

Finally, use your support systems and the many resources available to you. Talk to your doctor, ostomy nurse, mental health care provider and other ostomates about your concerns. One excellent resource is the United Ostomy Association of America, found at [www.ostomy.org](http://www.ostomy.org). There are many ostomate groups on social media, such as Facebook and Instagram. Just type “ostomate” in the search bar. There is a wealth of knowledge and support out there. Take advantage of gaining support from other people who live a full life with an ostomy and live your best life.

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