

YOGURT TABLETS

Via Port Huron, MI Chapter

Taking two or three yogurt tablets a day is a great aid in lessening stoma noise, and it also counteracts odor and acidity. Tablets contain the same culture (*Acidophilus Lactobacilli*) as in regular yogurt purchased in the grocery store, but perhaps the tablets will be easier to tolerate for those who dislike yogurt.

This supplement will not harm you and there is no toxicity involved. You might try them to see if they work for you. If you are uncertain, consult your doctor.

FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCE OSTOMY FUNCTION

via *Austi-Mate Journal*, Austin, TX

Quite often patients experience a sudden reversal in normal ostomy function due to medications or treatments they are undergoing. The following information might be helpful to keep in mind.

Antibiotics - These often cause diarrhea, even in patients without an ostomy. Ostomates are no exception, and if the problem becomes severe, notify your physician immediately. In the meantime, keep Gatorade or a like-drink on hand to maintain adequate electrolyte balance.

Pain Medications - These are often constipating. Extra irrigations or laxatives or stool softeners might be required for colostomates to combat the side effects of medicine. Perhaps the dosage of pain reliever can be reduced to eliminate the situation. If not, consider one of the above alternatives.

Chemotherapy - Many cancer patients have follow-up chemotherapy after surgery or as an alternative to surgery. That often produces nausea and/or vomiting. Gatorade is again good to keep on hand for electrolyte balance.

Radiation Therapy - This often produces the same effects as chemotherapy and should be treated accordingly.

Travel - Travel can cause constipation in some patients and diarrhea in others. Be aware that these are possibilities. Altered diet when traveling accounts for some of this, plus the excitement of new surroundings. Allow sufficient time for irrigations and take along an anti-diarrhea medication. Check with your doctor if you are not familiar with what works best for you to control diarrhea.

Antacids - Those with magnesium can cause diarrhea. Perhaps you will want to ask your doctor to suggest some with aluminum rather than magnesium.

Drink plenty of liquids - Tea is always a good source of potassium (so are orange juice and bananas). Coca Cola also contains some potassium. Bouillon cubes are a good source of sodium. Remember that some of the signs of electrolyte imbalance are irritability, nausea and drowsiness. Be prepared and prevent this problem when possible.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORT GROUPS

Via the *Austi-Mate Journal*, Austin, TX

Years ago support groups for people diagnosed with cancer were often frowned upon or dismissed as 'touch-feely.' Many believed that talking about their feelings or asking for help were signs of weakness. Some even feared that meeting others with similar problems would fuel depression and self-pity.

Times have changed, however, and so have theories about the value of talk. Today, more and more hospitals are offering emotional support—with groups and one-on-one counseling—as part of the standard treatment for rehabilitation. Earlier this year, the National Cancer Institute, together with two other groups, launched a national campaign to raise awareness of the vital role emotional support

plays in enhancing quality of life for people with cancer. Some research suggests that support may even increase longevity.

With a little help from strangers, it makes sense that emotional support from a caring circle of close friends or family would buffer the stress suffered. But many patients say they lack open communication within their families. As research and the experiences of many people have born out, involvement in a support group comprised of others in the same boat can fill a unique void.

Experts also speculate that emotional assistance confers physical benefits by decreasing stress. Depression overworks the body's stress response system, and it may be that participating in a support group helps lift depression.

Thus a group of peers can be a place where people can vent some of their feelings without suffering guilt about burdening an intimate partner or friend. While research on the mind-body connection and cancer is still preliminary, there is no doubt that emotional support can ease psychological stress. Support groups that were once considered ancillary aspects in treatment have moved into the mainstream, playing an integral role in enhancing—and possibly prolonging—the lives of millions of people.

HOW TO TREAT ILEOSTOMY BLOCKAGE

Source: United Ostomy Association, National Office

Symptoms: Thin, clear liquid output with foul odor; cramping, abdominal pain near the stoma; decrease in amount of or dark-colored urine, abdominal and stomal swelling.

Step One: At Home

Cut the opening of your pouch a little larger than normal because the stoma may swell.

If there is stomal output and you are not nauseated or vomiting, only consume liquids such as Coke, sports drinks, or tea.

Take a warm bath to relax the abdominal muscles.

Try several different body positions, such as a knee-chest position, as it might help move the blockage forward.

Massage the abdomen and the area around the stoma as this might increase the pressure behind the blockage and help it to “pop out.” Most food blockages occur just below the stoma.

Step Two: If you are still blocked, vomiting, or have no stomal output for several hours:

Call your doctor or WOC/ET Nurse and report what is happening and what you tried at home to alleviate the problem. Your doctor or WOC/ET Nurse will give you instructions (i.e., meet at the emergency room, come to the office). If you are told to go to the emergency room, the doctor or WOC/ET Nurse can call in orders for your care there.

If you cannot reach your WOC/ET Nurse or surgeon and there is **no output** from the stoma, go to the emergency room immediately.

IMPORTANT: TAKE ALL OF YOUR POUCH SUPPLIES (e.g., pouch, wafer, tail closure, skin barrier spray, irrigation sleeve, etc.)

COLOSTOMY HINTS

Via *Austi-Mate Journal*, Austin, TX and Lawton-Ft. Sill Chapter, Lawton, OK

In a normal state of healthy, the consistency of stool, which the bowel puts out, is related to what is put in. Timing and frequency of meals, emotional experiences, medicines, and sickness also play a role. This is true whether one has a colostomy or not.

Constipation is often the result of an unbalanced diet or too small an intake of food or liquids. A medicine may also be the cause. Fear may be at the root of it, or faulty irrigation practices. These are matters to talk over with your ET nurse or physician. If you have had constipation problems in the past, before surgery, remember how you solved them and try the same methods. DO NOT use laxatives without asking your physician.

Diarrhea is usually a warning that something is not right. Diarrhea is defined as frequent, loose or watery bowel movements in greater amounts than customarily experienced whether one has a colostomy or not. Diarrhea must be distinguished from loose bowel movements. Loose bowels are common in transverse, as well as ascending colostomies. This is due to the shortened length of the colon and is not a sign of sickness or disease. Certain foods or drinks may produce diarrhea. If this happens, and you should discover which they are, avoid them.

If you have persistent diarrhea or constipation, talk with your physician or WOC/ET nurse. Discuss the foods and liquids you take, your eating schedule and quantities, and any medications you might be taking. Something may be prescribed for you to help slow things down or to stimulate the bowel—you need a well balanced diet and sufficient fluids to obtain a good output.

Odors are usually associated with gas, loose bowels, or diarrhea. Some foods can produce odor, i.e., eggs, cabbage, cheese, cucumber, onion, garlic, fish, dairy foods, and coffee are among them. If you find one or the other bothers you, avoid it. Some medicines cause stools to have an odor, for example, some vitamins and antibiotics. Discuss this problem with your physician. He may be able to prescribe another type of medicine.

Odors may be particularly prominent with transverse colostomies. This problem may be combated by placing deodorants in the appliance and by frequently replacing pouches. It is best to use odor-proof pouches, which can be thrown away after a single use.

If the colon is emptied well, odors are likely to be less; irrigation may be helpful. It may be necessary to use an oral deodorant; there are several on the market. Discuss these problems with your ET nurse or physician.

AGING AND THE OSTOMATE

via the Oakland County, MI Chapter

Growing old is a life-long process, and the physical, social, and psychological liabilities of aging are all part of it. Thanks to gerontology and geriatrics, we know more information than ever before on an intelligent approach to aging.

As we grow older, subtle changes occur in our bodies. The most insidious is our skin. It loses elasticity and becomes thinner and drier, thus becoming prone to wrinkles and irritation. These changes can become real problems for those who must wear an appliance all the time. To prevent leakage as the skin becomes more wrinkled, one should stand up straight when changing the appliance. With one hand, stretch the skin so that it is tight, and with the other hand attach the appliance (using a mirror may help you see what you are doing).

The skin over the entire body tends to bruise more easily and heal more slowly as we age. We need to be more careful when removing an appliance. A skin barrier covering the entire area under the appliance, or a very thin application of a skin-care product may help protect the tender skin.

Aging may also result in less strength in the hands. Arthritis, lessening mobility, or pain in the fingers can make it difficult to put together a two-piece appliance. A one-piece appliance may eliminate the task of stretching a pouch over a faceplate. To sum it up, aging is a phenomenon we must all face, and when one considers the alternative, it's not too bad!