



Your Guide to
Parastomal Hernia
and Physical Activity





Reduce
the *fear.*
Exercise
safely.
Move with
confidence.

The fear of developing a parastomal hernia, or making one worse, shouldn't stop you from exercising and doing the things you enjoy.

Even if you already have a parastomal hernia, it's really important to be as active as you can and not to fear exercise.

This leaflet will provide tips on how to exercise safely and feel more confident about physical activity.

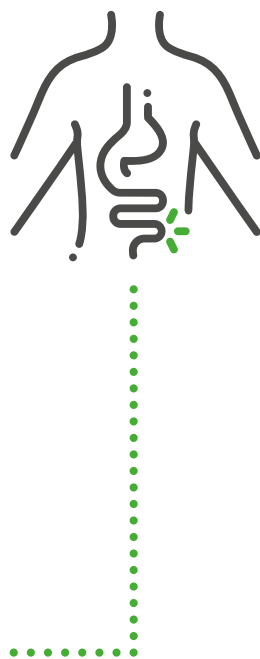
It is written by a team of clinical stoma nurses and an exercise specialist, and is based on the most up-to-date evidence. We hope it will give you confidence and encourage you to be active and enjoy exercise.

What is a parastomal hernia?

A parastomal hernia is a bulge around the stoma where extra loops of bowel have come through the abdominal wall next to the stoma and lie between the muscle and the skin. There is little conclusive research about parastomal hernias, and no-one knows for sure why some people develop one and others don't. They are, however, quite common, and around 50%-60% of people who have a stoma will eventually develop a parastomal hernia.^{1,2}

While some are problematic, causing blockages, leakage and discomfort, many people find that their parastomal hernia remains small and causes very few issues. So, even if you have been told you have a parastomal hernia, or you think you may have one, it shouldn't stop you from living your life and doing your usual activities.

It's very important to remain positive and focus on the things you can do to help yourself and your situation, such as staying active and doing exercises to strengthen your abdominal muscles. Doing appropriate abdominal exercises may reduce your risk of developing a parastomal hernia, or prevent your parastomal hernia becoming larger.³



How do I know if I have a parastomal hernia (PSH)?

Diagnosis of a PSH will require a prone CT scan, but can often be identified following examination by a surgeon or nurse. However, there are several symptoms which you can look out for. Initially you may notice a small bulge next to your stoma, a sensation of discomfort or a 'dragging' sensation around your stoma or feel that the 'stoma side' of your abdomen protrudes more. Some people report having more blockages or feeling uncomfortable/bloated after eating.

If you do notice any of these symptoms, mention it to your stoma nurse or doctor at your next appointment. A PSH usually develops slowly over time and in most cases will remain small and unproblematic, so try not to worry unnecessarily.

If you experience pain, discomfort around your stoma, symptoms of a blockage, or you feel your PSH is getting worse, make sure you contact your stoma nurse or doctor.



What causes parastomal hernias?

And what can I do about them?

It's not fully understood why some people develop a PSH and other people don't. Research is ongoing and doctors are trying to find out more about parastomal hernias, what causes them, and how to repair them effectively.

Based on the current evidence available and the clinical experience of specialists and clinicians involved in preparing this guide, there appears to be a range of 'factors' that may increase your chances of developing a PSH or a hernia becoming larger.⁶

- Being overweight/having a large waist circumference (over 100cm)⁷
- Having had multiple abdominal surgeries
- Previous history of other types of hernias
- Surgical technique, size of stoma or having a loop stoma
- Having had chemotherapy/steroid treatment
- Having a colostomy (formed from the colon) rather than an ileostomy or urostomy
- Smoking
- High alcohol consumption
- Being elderly or frail
- Poor core stability or weak core/abdominal muscles
- Being generally de-conditioned and unfit with low muscle mass
- An acute episode or ongoing respiratory condition such as COPD, sinusitis, hayfever or asthma, particularly with an ongoing cough, sneezing or nose blowing
- An acute episode of vomiting
- Incorrect heavy lifting, or lifting with poor technique too soon after surgery
- Any activity, job, hobby or sport that creates repeated excessive straining especially soon after surgery or without having done correct core muscle rehabilitation

Even if you already have a PSH, there are still things you can do to keep yourself as healthy as possible. You may find it helpful to concentrate on the lifestyle factors that you can influence.

You may not be able to change your medical treatments, surgeries and medical history, but you can change your lifestyle factors. This can help give you a sense of control, as well as help you feel healthier, happier and more positive.



What can I do to help myself?

Immediately post surgery, make sure you follow a step-by-step recovery program to regain function and strength of your abdominal muscles. These exercises are illustrated in the me+recovery program. In the first few weeks after surgery, avoid heavy lifting and any activity which causes straining or pressure around your stoma.

Then, over a period of weeks and months, you can gradually build back up to your normal activities, while also doing your core and abdominal recovery exercises.

In the longer term

Lifestyle choices such as being physically active, doing core exercises, maintaining muscle mass, healthy eating, not smoking or drinking alcohol, and keeping a healthy weight can all be helpful.

Think about trying to ‘mitigate’ the risk factors as far as you can, keep yourself healthy and live your life without limiting yourself.

Maintaining your independence, being able to travel, lift heavy shopping bags, and do daily tasks without fear is particularly important, and you shouldn’t have to avoid any activities.

The way in which you lift heavy things, exercise and move is more important, and is key to reducing pressure on your stoma or PSH. The ConvaTec **me+ recovery** program provides exercises on how to strengthen your core muscles and tips on safe moving and lifting.

For more information on the **me+ recovery** program, call the **ConvaTec Customer Relations Center** at **1-800-465-6302**, Monday through Friday, 8:00am to 6:00pm (EST).



As a colorectal surgeon, I’m only too aware of how challenging stoma surgery is for my patients. But, I also know how important it is for them to make a full recovery and to return to their normal lives.

Professor Sina Dorudi BSc MBBS PhD FRCS(Eng) FRCS(Gen Surg)
Consultant Colorectal Surgeon

Can I exercise if I already have a parastomal hernia?

The short answer is 'Yes'. Physical activity is so important for your health and has so many benefits, reducing the risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes and cancer and many other chronic conditions, as well as your mental well-being. It helps you feel good about yourself, can make you feel positive and happy, and should be a vital part of your life.

Try not to be fearful of exercise and movement. It should be possible for you to live an active life and do anything you like, provided you don't have complications with your PSH. There are some great examples of other people with parastomal hernias who are athletes and do a wide range of sports such as swimming, running, cycling, yoga, golf etc, but also many people who live a normal life enjoying do-it-yourself projects, gardening, housework and daily activities.

However, when you have a stoma, and more so if you already have a PSH, you need to exercise 'intelligently' and learn to become 'body aware'.

What does 'intelligent exercise'⁸ mean?

- + Become aware of how your body moves and feels, and know how to modify movements or activities if you feel pressure or a bulging around your stoma
- + Build a strong body with appropriate exercise and resistance training. Being stronger – especially in your arms - will reduce strain on your abdomen and allow you to move more safely
- + Strengthen your pelvic floor and abdominal muscles correctly with core exercises and clinical Pilates
- + Learn how to exercise with good technique and correct breathing patterns
 - seek advice from a trainer or instructor



Should I do abdominal & core exercises?

Yes. Remember that your core muscles are an integral part of your body and are involved in every movement you do. It's impossible to move without using your core muscles in some way.

Your core needs to be strong and functional, allowing you to move confidently and feel less vulnerable. Strong functional core muscles may help reduce your risk of a PSH or could prevent a PSH from growing in size.

Think about your core muscles as your 'internal support garment', a bit like 'scaffolding' for your stoma. Your 'core' muscles include your abdominal muscles, but also muscles in your back, sides or your torso, bottom and hips.

Even if you're already fit, go back a few steps and learn the foundations of good core control.

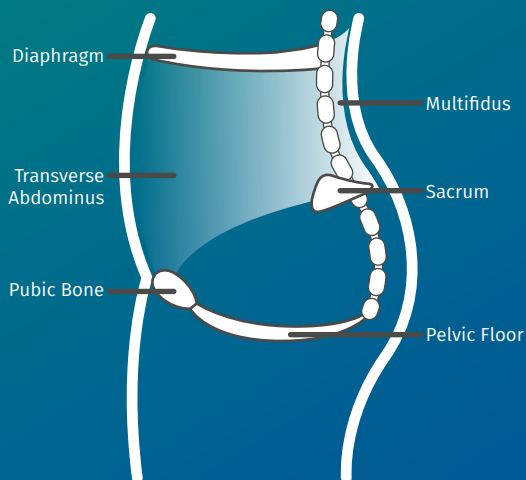
Start with things like breathing exercises and gentle Pilates style, physiotherapy type exercises to engage the deep internal core muscles, before moving on to more traditional exercises.

These exercises are all shown in the ConvaTec **me+ recovery** program.

me+ recovery is a series of step-by-step exercises, designed for people with a stoma, and is ideal for people who also have a hernia.

Once you feel yourself becoming stronger, you can then progress to more challenging exercises.

For more information on the me+ recovery program, call the **ConvaTec Customer Relations Center** at **1-800-465-6302**, Monday through Friday, 8:00am to 6:00pm (EST).



The Core Muscles

*Image with permission from
The Bowel Cancer Recovery Toolkit. S. Russell*

What core exercises should I avoid?

Everyone is different, so you must listen to your own body. There are various ways to modify and adapt any core exercise to make it safer and reduce pressure on your stoma. It can take many years to build up to advanced exercises such as planking, full sit-ups and press-ups and you need to be strong enough to execute the exercise correctly. That doesn't mean you shouldn't do them, just be sure to progress to that level safely.

Always watch out for a feeling of 'bulging', pressure or doming around your stoma when doing any exercise. If you feel pressure around your stoma, this means you're not quite strong enough to do that exercise or movement. Simply try a less challenging version.

If you have an especially large or uncomfortable PSH, you may wish to avoid movements lying on your tummy or on all fours – where gravity may make your PSH feel uncomfortable. But you can still do core and pelvic floor exercises and choose exercises lying on your back instead.

If you do fitness classes or workouts at home, at the gym or local community, then just make sure it's the right level for you and you're not pushing yourself too hard. If you attend a class, look for an instructor who is highly trained and has experience working with clients after abdominal surgery.









Adapted from ACSN guidelines on cancer survivorship, pelvic floor/prolapse guidelines and based on clinical experience.



me+ support team: Call 1-800-465-6302



How can I exercise and move more safely?⁸

-  Avoid 'bracing', straining or bearing down when pushing, pulling or lifting – avoid a feeling of pressure or 'bulging' in your pelvic floor or around your stoma
-  Avoid holding your breath during an exercise. Always breathe OUT on the effort part (or when lifting) of an exercise or activity
-  Learn how to breathe from your diaphragm – search online for some 'diaphragm breathing techniques'. This helps to engage your deep core muscles correctly
-  When lifting anything heavy (weights, dogs, children, bicycles, golf clubs etc), keep the load close to your body and use the strength of your arms to carry and lift – and try to exhale as you do the lift
-  Do appropriate core muscle and pelvic floor exercises to build strength and function
-  Strengthen your arms with resistance training (especially your biceps), so they do the work for you when lifting. This reduces the strain on your abdomen
-  Be mindful of how you move and lift all the time, when getting in and out of cars, bed and chairs – and when lifting everyday items or when doing housework or DIY
-  If you don't feel strong enough to do something and you feel pressure or straining around your abdomen, then reduce the load or adapt the movement

Is there anything I should avoid?

Generally, there's nothing you should completely 'avoid' but you may need to modify or adapt certain movements or exercises. Become more aware of how your body feels and look out for any excess strain around your stoma. Remember that everyone is different and you should aim to live your life as you want to, be positive, get moving and enjoy your exercise. If you have a PSH but you don't have pain or symptoms, then don't worry. Carry on as normal.

Just be mindful about correct movement and ensure good technique when doing any activity or lifting. Make sure you're strong enough to do the activity and movement. If you feel pressure around your stoma or PSH during an activity, then it generally means the movement is too challenging or the weight is too heavy. Remember that everyone should do appropriate abdominal rehabilitation exercises and continue to do them for life.

If you do more formal exercise classes or workouts, you may wish to modify or avoid some of the classic 'core exercises'. Things like planks, sit-ups, 'v' sits and straight leg raises may be too challenging initially. But everyone is different, so listen to your own body and do what feels right. Always work on your deep core muscles first, which creates your internal support and follow the safe exercise tips listed above.

Other things like using a rowing machine, using a leg press in the gym or lifting very heavy weights too soon may create too much strain, so again just listen to your body, and if you feel excessive pressure or bulging around your PSH, then make the exercise easier or choose an alternative.

If your PSH is uncomfortable or you have regular blockages or pain, then speak with your doctor or nurse and take their advice about appropriate exercise.



Just take it step by step and don't expect too much of yourself too soon. If you want to try an activity, go along and watch from the side lines first so you know what to expect. It helps build up the confidence to give it a go next time.

Julie
Patient





Should I wear a support ‘belt’ or garment?

If you have a PSH and it feels unsupported or uncomfortable, you may feel more confident wearing supportive clothing (high-waisted underwear, lycra tights or shorts) or a specific stoma/hernia support garment. Research has shown⁴ that an appropriate garment can help you feel more confident, able to exercise and be active.

However, wearing a support garment is only part of the overall picture and, on its own, is unlikely to either prevent a PSH or stop one getting bigger. So be sure to focus on all your lifestyle factors including healthy eating, not smoking, weight management and core exercises as well.

It's important to speak to your stoma nurse if thinking about support garments as they can advise you for your own situation.



Some people may be concerned about exercising and potentially making their hernia worse. But patients with stomas can participate in many forms of exercise without fear of making their hernia worse, particularly if guided to perform safe core exercises.

Mr Mark George BSc MS FRCS (Gen)

Consultant Colorectal and General Surgeon

What are the recommendations for exercise?

For good health, the CSEP (Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology) guidelines recommend that we should aim for a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week – ideally spread out into daily amounts of 20-30 minutes. Moderate exercise is a level where you feel warm, a little breathless and that your heart rate has increased. It's better to be active every day than to do all 150 minutes in one day.

Continual exercise such as brisk walking, jogging, cycling, home exercise workouts or swimming are some good options. Gardening, dog walking (briskly), home improvement projects and housework all help you stay active too.

In addition, it's recommended to do two sessions of resistance exercise per week to strengthen your muscles. Simple exercises such as squats or push-ups can be done at home, or you can buy weights, resistance bands or use gym equipment.

Activities like tai chi, Pilates and yoga can also be very good for strength, balance and mobility and focus on breathing, focus and mindfulness, which can help reduce stress and high blood pressure.

The most important thing to remember is any exercise is better than no exercise, so don't worry if you're not as active as you'd like. Build up slowly and do what you can. The fitter you get, the better you'll feel.

There are many people with stomas and parastomal hernias who are high performance athletes, compete in contact sports, weightlifting and extreme activities. If you can do more and feel able, then don't give your PSH a second thought. Live your life and don't be limited.



Any final tips?

The key message is that exercise is generally very safe for anyone with a stoma or a parastomal hernia⁵. Don't fear exercise and movement. Be positive and stay as active as you possibly can. Remember to do your core abdominal exercises for life which will give you a sense of control and more confidence, whether you already have a parastomal hernia or you're worried about developing one.

Physical activity is crucial for your general health. Humans are designed to move. Our bodies are not designed to be inactive. Inactivity is linked with chronic illness and poor health.

Exercise boosts your mood and keeps your body strong and your mind happy. Your stoma is only a small part of you and the rest of your body needs and deserves to move.

Stay active for the sake of your physical and mental well-being and to live your life without fear.

Sign up for the ConvaTec me+™ recovery program

All the core exercises in the program are appropriate and ideal for anyone who has a stoma or a parastomal hernia. Listen to your body and adapt any movement that feels uncomfortable.

Call the **ConvaTec Customer Relations Center at 1-800-465-6302** to speak to a member of the me+ support team.

If you experience pain, discomfort around your stoma or symptoms of a blockage, or you feel your PSH is getting worse, make sure to contact your stoma nurse or doctor.

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Important Note

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For more information, please call our **Customer Relations Center** (Registered Nurses on staff) at **1-800-465-6302**, Monday through Friday, 8:00am to 6:00pm (EST), or visit **convatec.ca**



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