Ostomy Concerns

Know when to contact your Ostomy Nurse

This guide uses a traffic-light system to help you decide how urgently you should seek help for an ostomy-related question or problem.

GREEN | ROUTINE QUESTION OR CONCERN

"I am generally well, but I have a question or minor concern."

- Questions about ostomy products or accessories
- Wanting to try a different pouching system
- Help choosing or using a barrier ring, paste, belt or other product
- Questions about diet, exercise, bathing, swimming or clothing
- A minor change in stoma or output, but otherwise feeling well
- Mild skin irritation
- Questions about obtaining or ordering supplies
- Advice on improving appliance fit

WHAT TO DO
Contact your ostomy nurse with your question or concern. Continue your usual ostomy care while waiting for advice.

AMBER | NEEDS ATTENTION SOON

"Something is not working properly, and I need help before it becomes a bigger problem."

- My pouch is leaking repeatedly
- My appliance is no longer staying on for its usual wear time
- Skin around my stoma is increasingly red, sore, burning or weeping
- My stoma or abdomen has changed, and my appliance no longer fits
- My output is much higher or more watery than usual
- I am concerned I may be becoming dehydrated
- Persistent cramping or abdominal discomfort
- My output has noticeably decreased and I am concerned
- My stoma appears swollen or has changed colour, but I am otherwise stable

WHAT TO DO
Contact your ostomy nurse promptly.

Monitor:

- Ostomy output
- Fluid intake
- Urine amount and colour
- Abdominal symptoms (bloating, pain, changes in the type and/or amount of output.
- Changes in your stoma or surrounding skin

If symptoms become severe, rapidly worsen, or you develop signs of dehydration or bowel obstruction, move to RED.

RED | URGENT MEDICAL PROBLEM

"Do not wait for a routine ostomy appointment."

Possible Bowel Obstruction / Food Blockage — watch for:

- Little or no ostomy output when output would normally be expected
- Increasing abdominal cramps or pain
- Abdominal swelling or bloating
- Nausea or vomiting
- A swollen or enlarged stoma
- A sudden stop in output, especially after a food that may have caused a blockage

Seek urgent medical advice. If you have significant pain, persistent vomiting, marked abdominal swelling, or worsening symptoms with little or no output, seek emergency medical assessment. Do not force food or large amounts of fluid if vomiting or severely unwell.

Severe Dehydration / Possible Acute Kidney Injury — watch for:

- Very little or no urine
- Very dark urine
- Severe thirst or a very dry mouth
- Dizziness, fainting or marked weakness
- Confusion or unusual drowsiness
- Very high or persistently watery ostomy output
- Unable to keep fluids down
- Dehydration symptoms not improving with your prescribed fluid/electrolyte plan

Seek urgent medical assessment. If able to drink, follow the oral rehydration/fluid plan from your healthcare team. Go to an Emergency Department or call emergency services if severely unwell, fainting, confused, unable to drink, passing very little/no urine, or rapidly worsening.

EMERGENCY | CALL EMERGENCY SERVICES

Regardless of your ostomy, call emergency services for:

- Collapse or loss of consciousness
- Severe difficulty breathing
- Severe chest pain
- Severe uncontrolled bleeding
- Signs of shock
- Sudden severe abdominal pain with rapid deterioration
- Severe confusion or inability to stay awake

QUICK REFERENCE

LEVEL	MEANING	ACTION
GREEN	Routine question	Contact your ostomy nurse
AMBER	Problem developing	Contact your ostomy nurse promptly
RED	Potentially serious problem	Seek urgent medical assessment
EMERGENCY	Life-threatening symptoms	Call emergency services

IF YOU ARE UNSURE

If you are concerned about your condition or feel that something is seriously wrong, seek medical advice rather than waiting for your ostomy nurse to respond.