Hints & Tips for

Skin Care around your stoma

By Wendy Osborne
in conjunction with SALTS

Good skin care is a crucial part of any stoma care routine, because it will help maintain a healthy skin around your stoma and assist in successful stoma bag adhesion. If the skin becomes red, sore or broken this may increase the risk of leakages and further skin damage. Left unattended, the skin condition may worsen, leading not only to increased worry and discomfort for you, but difficulty in getting your appliance to stick, which may lead to the problem becoming worse.

There are many reasons why the skin around your stoma may become sore, so it is important to know what may be the possible causes, and know that you can do something to reduce the problem. The main reason is usually the output (faeces/poo) getting directly onto the skin or underneath the flange/pouch which should be protecting the skin immediately around your stoma. Infections, underlying skin diseases such as eczema and skin sensitivities to the products are less common reasons for skin problems.

I hope that by reading this article you will find some hints and tips which may help you to prevent or identify any reason for soreness, and will encourage you to contact your local Stoma Care Nurse to treat or review your stoma if you have any queries or concerns.

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Some of the reasons why soreness or leakages may happen...

Has the shape or size of your stoma changed?

• Does your stoma look larger or smaller than it used to?
• Is there any skin showing around the stoma when you place the template over the stoma to check the size, or is the size of the hole smaller than your stoma?

Suggestion...
Use a template (or the backing off your stoma pouch/flange) to check the size of the hole that is cut in your stoma pouch/flange – it should fit snugly around your stoma.

Checking your template:
If you are not sure how to do this, please contact your Stoma Care Nurse who can check your template for you.
Has your tummy shape changed?

- Have you put on weight or lost weight? This will change the shape of your tummy and may change the shape of your stoma.
- Have you got any skin creases, scars or swellings around your stoma (e.g. a hernia)7 These will make the area around the stoma uneven and prevent the stoma pouch/flange from sitting flat against the skin.

Suggestion...
Once again use a template to check the size of your stoma as mentioned above.

If you have any skin creases etc., there are many seals and even different types of stoma pouches/flanges that can be used to help create a flat surface round the stoma.

Seek advice and a review by a Stoma Care Nurse who will be able to assess your stoma and the skin around it to help you find a solution to any changes.

Has the output from your stoma changed?

- Are you getting diarrhoea?
- Have you recently had any changes in your medication? (For example are you taking any antibiotics or having chemotherapy?)

Suggestion...
If the output from your stoma becomes loose/watery it has a greater chance of leading to a leak – fluid will find any weakness from which to escape.

Please contact a Stoma Care Nurse to discuss any such changes.

Do you have any lumps or bumps around your stoma?

- Have you noticed any bleeding from these lumps/bumps?

Suggestion...
Sometimes small lumps/bumps appear at the edge of your stoma. These may affect how your pouch/flange sticks around your stoma, but also they may be prone to bleeding. If they bleed this will make the back of your pouch/flange wet/blood stained and prevent it from sticking as well as it should do.

It is normal for the stoma to bleed a little as you are cleaning it (the bit of bowel that your stoma is made out of needs a good blood supply to keep it healthy).

If the bleeding is more than normal or you are getting problems with soreness or leakages, please contact your Stoma Care Nurse to check these lumps out for you.

Do you find that the faeces gets stuck at the top of the pouch/bag and does not drop down into the pouch?

This is called ‘pancaking’. It happens as a result of the filter in your stoma pouch letting all of the air out and creating a ‘vacuum effect’ within the pouch. As the faeces builds up at the top of your stoma pouch, it can push it self under the adhesive (sticky part of your pouch) and cause skin soreness.

Please contact your Stoma Care Nurse to discuss this further.

Here are a few hints and tips to keep the skin around your stoma healthy

- Only use warm water when cleaning the skin around your stoma
Soaps and baby wipes often contain perfume or moisturisers. These may affect how your pouch/flange sticks or may irritate your skin.

- Check the size of your stoma every few months
Make sure the hole in your stoma pouch/flange fits snugly around your stoma. If it is too large, skin will show and be irritated by the stoma output, which can make it sore. If the hole size is too small, it may cause the stoma to swell.

- Take your time when changing your pouch
Careful removal of the pouch will help to prevent any trauma/damage being caused to the skin. Always ensure that you check the skin around the stoma for any signs of early irritation and that the skin is dry before putting on your new pouch/flange as this will help the pouch to stick better.

- Gentleman, if you need to shave your skin around the stoma
Avoid using shaving creams or hair removal creams as these may irritate the skin. We suggest you use clean warm water and a new disposable razor to shave the area.

- Accessory products
There are many good products (wipes, creams and adhesive removers) that are available to help protect the skin around the stoma. Contact your Stoma Care Nurse or the Salts Healthcare Helpline for any advice or information on their use.

Remember: You don’t have to put up with sore skin or leakages. If you are having problems, contact your Stoma Care Nurse to arrange a review.
Salts Healthcare Helpline, 0800 626388 or the Colostomy Association Helpline, 0800 328 4257, can give you the contact number of a local Stoma Care Nurse.

Ps. A few more...
To ensure the skin around your stoma is dry before applying a pouch, you can use a hairdryer, tuned to the lowest setting.

Warm your clean pouch or flange on the radiator for a few minutes before putting it on. This will help the adhesive to stick to your skin.

When shaving the skin, hold the cardboard inside tube of a toilet roll around your stoma to protect it.