

# Your guide to reco✓ery

Patient Handbook



# Hello

Welcome to  recovery

If you've ever had stoma surgery, currently have a stoma or have had a reversal, then me+™ recovery is for you.

It will guide you – step-by-step - through your recovery after your operation and beyond.

It will help restore your confidence and to take the first steps towards having a healthy, fulfilling and active life.

The handbook covers a huge amount of information and is very comprehensive. It is designed to provide you with the most up-to-date advice about your recovery and will be invaluable to you over the weeks, months and years to come.

But please don't feel overwhelmed. We understand there's a lot of information to absorb and much to come to terms with.

Simply keep this pack safe and close by. Come back to it at any time and dip in and out as you feel able.

Just take your time; we're here for you every step of the way.

**This handbook is not meant to provide definitive advice and is for guidance only. At all times, if you have any concerns, please consult your stoma nurse or doctor/GP.**



“When I went through emergency surgery for a stoma in 2010, I found very little advice about physical activity and rehabilitation. Prior to my operation, I’d been a competitive runner, but I remember being completely floored by the surgery.

I lost all my confidence both physically and mentally. Luckily I had the knowledge from my previous training to rehabilitate my body, to get my abdominal muscles strong again and to get back on my feet. But not everyone is that fortunate. The more I talked to other people the more I found that most people had a similar experience to me. Too many people seem to be scared about doing physical activity or exercise and worried about doing themselves harm, when in fact there are so many benefits to being active.

At ConvaTec we are passionate about helping you

live your life to the full and so – alongside other healthcare experts – we’ve developed the me+™ recovery programme.

For me, getting active again after my surgery helped me rebuild my confidence and self-esteem and it gave me a sense of control over what had happened to me. Your stoma doesn’t need to be a barrier, it’s really just a challenge which you can overcome and the me+™ recovery programme is the first step to helping you do just that.”

**Best wishes Sarah**



**A message  
from the author**



**A message  
from  
Professor  
Sina Dorudi**



“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 physical recovery and to return to their normal lives.

There is no doubt that patients who adopt a more active recovery generally do better, not least their physical recovery progresses more rapidly. They also have a better quality of life, are fitter, healthier and tend to adapt to life with a stoma more easily.

Regular physical activity is important for all of us, but even more so after surgery and illness. Obviously take advice from your own surgeon and nurse, but be guided by your own body during recovery to get back on your feet sooner rather than later.

It’s also really important to spend some time concentrating specifically on your abdominal muscle recovery and I would encourage you to engage with the exercises such as those illustrated in the me+™ recovery programme.

Just take it one day at a time and best wishes for a healthy and full recovery.”

**Professor Sina Dorudi Consultant Colorectal Surgeon  
The Princess Grace Hospital, London**

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## Introduction

In the early days after your operation there's a lot to come to terms with, and it can be a difficult and challenging time.

But having a stoma doesn't have to stop you from living a completely normal and healthy life; from working, travelling, having children or doing any kind of physical activity or sport that you want. Although right now you may be wondering what the future holds, in time you will recover and you'll be able to return to your job, hobbies and interests.

In fact, many people with stomas are surprised just how well they adapt and in many cases their quality of life improves.



## Your recovery – it's in your hands

There are lots of things you can do to help your recovery. The team looking after you will guide you and this handbook is packed full of advice on practical things you can do to rebuild your body, health and confidence.

It comes as a surprise to many people that completely 'resting up' after surgery might not be the best approach. Of course it's important to rest and recover, but getting mobile soon after your operation can actually help you recover faster and have a more positive outcome in the long term.<sup>[1,2]</sup>

Getting the balance right is key. Just try to take it one step at a time and listen to your body. Be kind to yourself and allow yourself the adjustment you need to recover both physically and mentally, but equally don't be scared of moving and being active.

Doing a small amount of activity and some 'recovery' exercises may help you feel more confident and make a really positive difference to your well-being and recovery.

Appropriate activities in the early recovery phase might include:

- Walking
- Gentle core and tummy 'movements'
- Mobility, balance and co-ordination exercises

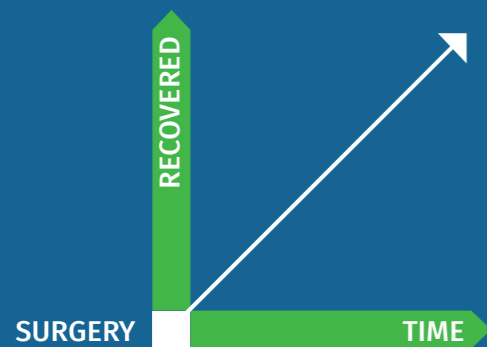
Balance this with appropriate amounts of sleep and rest; which your body needs to recover.

The only advice I was given after my surgery was not to lift a kettle. I had nothing from my surgeon and everything I read was negative and overly cautious. I was left groping around in the dark and didn't know what to do. I would have loved to have had a programme like this as it would have given me so much more confidence and structure to my recovery.

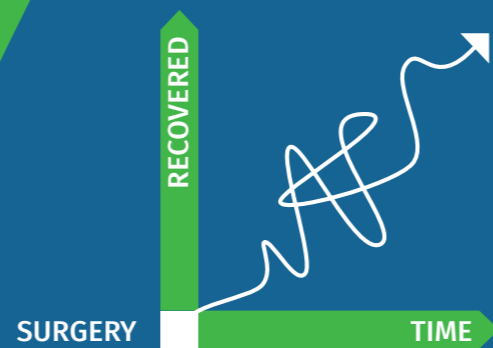
Maria



What you think it will be like



What it really will be like



Remember, everyone is different and it's important to listen to your body and be guided by how you feel.

You'll find you have good days, but then some days where you feel you've gone backwards. That's normal. Try to be patient and don't expect too much of yourself too soon. This graph may help you visualise the process. It can take a number of weeks for the wounds and tissue to fully heal<sup>[3]</sup>. However, during that recovery period you can help your recovery by beginning to gently take part in some gentle activity and movements. Follow the movement programme included in this pack, starting with Green Phase 1 which you can start within a few days after your surgery.

It is likely to take many months for your body to fully recover from the surgery and the illness that led to your stoma. So just take your time and be patient. Depending on the condition that led to your stoma in the first place, you may also have significant weight loss or gain, additional complications, cancer treatment, other surgical wounds and malnutrition, plus general aches and pains associated with bed rest and surgery. Be guided by your surgeon, doctor or stoma nurse on how your individual medical condition affects your recovery.

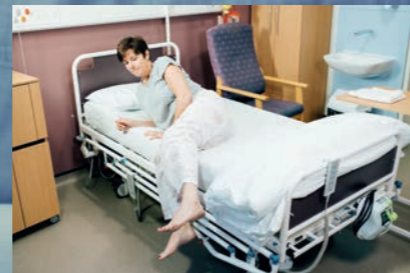
You can't rush your recovery. It's tempting to want to get back to your 'pre-op' fitness straight away, but that's not going to happen. If you can accept where you are and be patient it's a much better frame of mind. Set really small goals and targets and just take your time. You'll get there eventually.

Billy

#### TO GET INTO BED



Sit on the side of your bed and slowly lower yourself down sideways using your arm for support.



Then when lying on your side...



## Getting in and out of bed safely

After abdominal surgery it's very important you get in and out of bed safely to protect your tummy.

Avoid straining your tummy by sitting 'straight up' from a lying position. This places unwanted strain on the muscles of your abdominal wall.



...carefully bring your legs up to the bed one by one.



Then gently roll over onto your back.

#### TO GET OUT OF BED

- Come into a side lying position on the side of the bed with your knees bent
- Use your arms to push up sideways
- Slowly swing your legs over the side of the bed, so you finish by sitting up on the side of the bed.

Watch the video at [www.convatec.co.uk/meplus](http://www.convatec.co.uk/meplus)





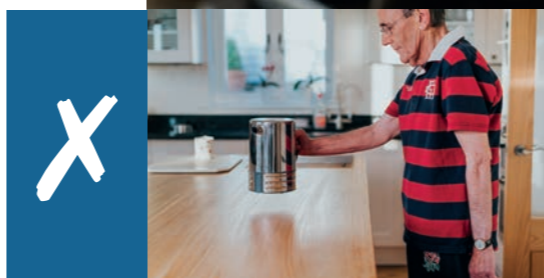
## Lifting and moving safely

In the early weeks after surgery you need to be careful with any lifting, carrying, pushing or pulling movements. Avoid lifting heavy or particularly awkward items. This can cause strain to your abdomen.

- Lifting safely is very important, even with relatively 'light' items such as a kettle or a shopping bag.
- Try to 'breathe out' as you lift and make sure you lift with good technique, holding the object close to your body.
- Any pushing, twisting or pulling movements need to be done with caution. In particular things like vacuuming and mowing the lawn can place strain on your tummy and you should avoid them for the first few weeks.
- If you have a dog, be careful that it doesn't pull on the lead and strain your tummy.
- Be cautious with physical housework and gardening for the first few weeks and then gradually build-up your daily activities as you feel ready.

### Safe Kettle Lifting Tips

- Only fill the kettle a quarter full (just with one cup of water in it)
- Position it close to your body, close to the edge of the kitchen work surface. Do not attempt to lift it from the back of the work surface
- Make sure you're steady and safe and not at risk of spilling hot water
- Gently tighten your deep tummy muscles (see Green Phase 1 to do this)
- Support yourself with your other hand on the work surface
- Lift the kettle keeping it close to your body, use your arm to lift and avoid straining your tummy.



The advice you get after surgery is well meaning but it is often disabling and can be depressing. Try to focus on what you CAN do, rather than what you can't.

A positive approach is so important.

Maria





# 4 Posture

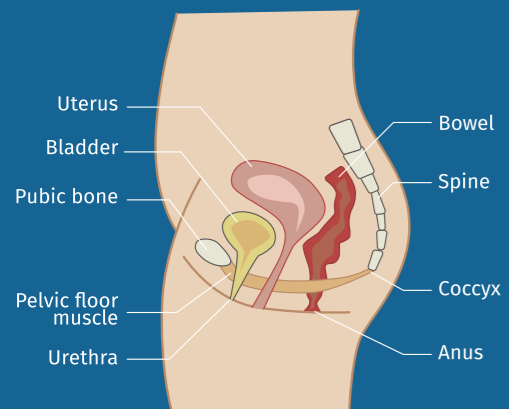
It's really important to listen to your body. It knows when it needs to rest, so do what it tells you. Don't feel guilty for resting, good foundations take time and they will stand you in good stead in the long run.  
Jo

After abdominal surgery it's common to slump or stoop over to protect your abdomen, especially if you're in pain. This can cause low back pain or other aches and pains, so although it's hard, try to adopt a more upright posture and think about 'standing tall'.

This will also help your breathing as well as encouraging your abdominal muscles to function normally again. Imagine you have a balloon on the top of your head and it's lifting you gently up through your spine. At the same

time, breathe deeply and exhale and relax. Try to adopt this tall posture when walking, standing and moving around. Just being aware of it will make a big difference.

# 5 ✓ Pelvic floor



Your pelvic floor is a very important group of muscles. Your pelvic floor supports your pelvic organs which include your bladder, rectum and uterus, is part of your 'core' group of muscles and acts like a sling of muscle at the bottom of your pelvis.

A well-functioning pelvic floor is essential for bowel and bladder control as well as organ support, even if you have a stoma, and it's important for both men and women.<sup>[5]</sup>

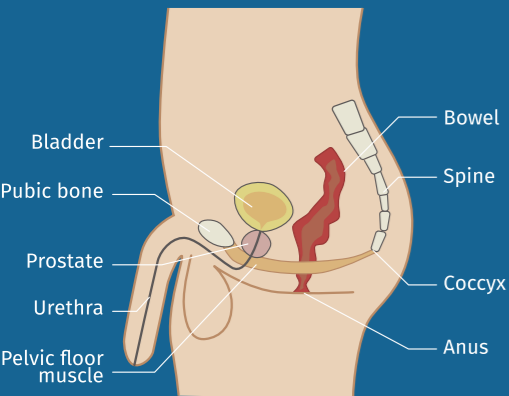
If your stoma is temporary and you're planning a reversal, an efficient pelvic floor will be essential to maintain bowel and bladder control after your stoma is reversed.

**So it's really important to do some pelvic floor training to prepare for your reversal operation.**

If your stoma is permanent, good pelvic floor health is important for posture, continence and support of your other internal organs.

Pelvic floor training is important for everyone, so these movements are included in this section of the handbook as everyone is advised to do them.

Do these movements before (if possible) and after your stoma operation, before your reversal (if appropriate) and forever more.



You can begin them as soon as you feel able after your operation. Check with your surgeon, nurse or doctor if you're unsure.

## How to strengthen your pelvic floor?

Start doing these movements lying on your back either in bed or on the floor. This position makes it easier to 'find' the muscles and feel them working. Eventually you should be able to do your pelvic floor exercises whilst sitting or standing.

- **Lie down on your back with** your knees bent and relax
- **Imagine** you're trying to close the opening to your vagina, anus or urethra (for men – try to get the feeling that you're gently pulling your testicles up into your body or stopping yourself breaking wind) and tighten up the muscles of your pelvic floor.
- **Visualise** trying to 'lift' your pelvic floor up inside your body. That you're lifting the muscle and drawing it up inside – like you're pulling a drawstring bag closed or trying to stop yourself from going to the toilet or breaking wind. Even if you have a stoma you should still be able to get this feeling.
- **It might be hard to get the feeling initially**, but it's very subtle and gentle, so keep trying.
- **Hold** the 'lift and tighten' feeling for a count of 5-10 seconds, breathe normally then gently release and allow your pelvic floor to fully relax. Breathe and

concentrate on relaxing and letting the muscles go.

- **Nothing should visibly move on the outside** – so try to avoid clenching your bottom or holding your breath. You are working on 'internal' muscles, so no-one should be able to tell that you're doing them.
- **Repeat x 5-10 times and do this 2-3 x per day**
- **Initially post op** (depending on the type of surgery you've had) this may be uncomfortable or especially difficult – particularly if you have had extensive surgery, so just try out a short gentle squeeze to begin with and as you get better you should be able to manage a stronger contraction.
- **In time** you should be able to do this when sitting or standing, so you can do it many times per day.

**Start gently with a very 'soft' squeeze and gradually build up to a stronger contraction'**

## I can't feel anything. Am I doing something wrong?

It can be hard to get the feeling of this initially, but persevere until you start to feel you can get a 'lift' and 'tightening' of your pelvic floor.

If you feel a 'bulge' rather than a 'lift', please stop and get advice from a specialist physiotherapist.

If you still can't feel anything or have more specific problems with incontinence, then please ask to be referred to a specialist physiotherapist.

## Quick tip

Slow deep breathing can help you to relax and manage pain after your operation.

Close your eyes and breathe in slowly for a count of 4, then exhale for a count of 4.

Repeat as often as needed.



## Breathing and relaxation

Simple breathing techniques can help you to relax, improve healing and reduce anxiety.

Deep breathing encourages you to use your lungs properly, particularly after abdominal surgery.

Try the following breathing technique at any time before or after your surgery:

1. Sit upright in a chair with your back well supported or propped up in bed
2. Relax
3. First - Take 3 full breaths - exhaling fully and forcefully out of your mouth
4. Then close your eyes
5. Place one hand on your belly (just below tummy button)
6. Place the other hand on your breastbone
7. **Step 1** - Breathe in gently through your nose; you should feel your belly move outward towards your hand.
8. **Step 2** - Then continue to breathe in, you should feel the hand on your breastbone move up and away.
9. **Step 3** - Keep breathing in and allow your shoulders to rise up towards ears as the top of your lung fills.
10. Then slowly breathe out through your mouth. As you exhale, lower your shoulders, feel your side ribs move in and down and your belly pulls softly inwards and away from your hand. Imagine your body is an umbrella and you're closing it down.
11. Pause and repeat 2-3 times.

# 7 ✓ Walking – getting back on your feet

When you're in hospital the physiotherapist or nurse will get you out of bed to start doing some short walks quite soon after your surgery. By the time you leave hospital you should be doing longer walks along the ward a few times per day and it's important to continue to do this when you get back home.

Walking is one of the best things you can do in the recovery period. It will help to boost your confidence, rebuild your muscles and help your recovery.<sup>[4]</sup>

- **When you're back at home**, gradually build up the time you can walk for.
- **Start** with short 5-10 minute walks twice a day.
- **Stay close to home** and just walk around the block. It's much better to do 'little and often' rather than try to push it too far.
- **Then as you get stronger** you can then increase the distance bit by bit.

You could set a goal to get to the next lamppost or the postbox – and make a note in your 'Recovery Diary' of how you felt and how far you walked.

- **Take a friend** or partner with you for support and don't go too far from home to begin with.

- **Walk with good posture**, keeping your head up – imagine a balloon on the top of your head pulling you up towards the sky
- **Wear comfortable supportive shoes**, ideally trainers or lace up shoes.
- **Plan your walk** so you can rest afterwards and take pain medication just before you go. Take a mobile phone with you.
- **Within just a few weeks**, you'll be able to walk further and should be able to walk for 30-40 minutes.
- **Go at your own pace** but don't be afraid to try a little more each time
- **Get a pedometer** or use your smartphone to track your daily stepcount. Then work on gradually increasing it as you get stronger and fitter. You could track your steps in your recovery diary.



## Join a walking group

As you get stronger it can be a great idea to join a health walking group to keep you motivated. There are lots of options. Find out more:

**Walking for health – England**

[www.walkingforhealth.org.uk](http://www.walkingforhealth.org.uk)

**Let's Walk Cymru – Wales**

[www.letswalkcymru.org.uk](http://www.letswalkcymru.org.uk)

**Paths for All – Scotland**

[www.pathsforall.org.uk](http://www.pathsforall.org.uk)

*I've found that having a stoma really doesn't stop me from doing anything at all. I love climbing, cycling and being out on the wild Scottish mountains. Why would I let my stoma prevent me from having so much fun?*

Billy



## The me+™ recovery programme

Here at ConvaTec, we are passionate about helping you to live an active and healthy life. The first step is to put you in the driving seat. You know your body best and you can take control of your own recovery with the right support along the way.

You should feel confident and capable of living the life you want. Whether that's being able to tend your garden, do housework, go to the gym, run, swim, cycle, travel, do your job or compete in sports.

### How did we develop me+™ recovery?

This movement programme has been developed in conjunction with a team of stoma care nurse specialists, physiotherapists, exercise specialists, surgeons, patients and other health care professionals. It is also the result of extensive research, evidence and a research study involving over 2600 patients in the UK conducted by ConvaTec in 2016.

### What is it about?

- The ethos is to have an 'active recovery' process rather than a 'passive one'.
- Getting the balance right is vital, and you need to listen to your body and be guided by it.
- It helps you focus on the things you can do, rather than the things you can't.
- It gives you back some control and confidence

Please discuss this programme with your stoma care nurse, surgeon or other specialist so they can advise and support you through it.

## Abdominal and Core Recovery Programme Phases 1 – 3

Work through it carefully, listen to your body and seek advice from a physiotherapist or a highly trained exercise professional who is qualified in 'exercise referral' if you have any queries or concerns.

### How should I use this programme?

The moves included in this programme are designed specifically for anyone who has major abdominal surgery and a stoma, although they are suitable for everyone. They are gentle and appropriate for most people and you can do all the moves in the comfort of your own home.

You can work through the moves stage by stage, taking into consideration your health and any other medical conditions. Ask your doctor, surgeon or nurse for advice if you're not sure. **There are 3 phases to the programme:**

**Green Phase 1 is included in your initial pack.  
To get your copy of me+™ recovery Phase 2 and 3 please contact  
the me+™ helpline on 0800 467 866**

### Green Phase 1

Start in hospital and then continue at home. This phase is also the starting point if you've never done any abdominal movements before, even if your surgery was years ago.

### Blue Phase 2

These are a progression of the green moves, and whilst slightly more challenging are still gentle. You should be comfortable with the green moves before progressing to this phase. If you find it hard to get down onto the floor (if you've had a knee replacement for example) choose the 'sitting or standing' movements from this phase or do the moves on your bed.

### Purple Phase 3

These moves are a further progression and should only be done once you're confident with Phase 2. You may get to this stage some weeks after your surgery.

**Before you start any of the exercises in this programme, make sure you are in a safe environment and you are comfortable in your clothing. Check that your chair or bed is fixed and cannot move.**

If you have concerns or questions about your stoma appliance speak to your stoma nurse or surgeon.



You can view 'how to' videos for all of the recovery phases at [www.convatec.co.uk/meplus](http://www.convatec.co.uk/meplus)



## me+™ recovery Diary

Included in this pack is your me+™ recovery Diary. You can start to fill it in whenever you feel ready after your operation and then throughout your recovery to monitor your daily progress.

The me+™ recovery Diary is just for your own personal use, it can be really helpful to look back over it and see just how far you've come. When you need more copies of the me+™ recovery Diary please contact us on the me+™ helpline.

*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 sidelines first so you know what to expect. It helps build up the confidence to give it a go next time.*

Julie



## Pre-Op Preparation

Some people have a planned operation and may feel able to work through the programme before their surgery. This can help build strength and fitness in advance of surgery which may aid recovery.

As you wait for your operation, staying active with some gentle regular movement, brisk walking, jogging, cycling, swimming or any other activity you currently enjoy is really important. This may help with your mental wellbeing if you're feeling a bit anxious too.

Even if you're feeling unwell, some gentle walking and home based exercises might still be possible, and can help you feel more positive. Do what you can and try to avoid becoming sedentary which can lead to loss of muscle and fitness, depression, anxiety and low mood. Check with your doctor about what is appropriate for you.





As I am now 80 years young, my aims are relatively simple. I need to keep active and enjoy my life as much as I can. I have a personal trainer who comes to me once a week. I do stretching exercises, getting up from and sitting down on a chair, good for my balance and strengthening the legs. I do not want to become immobile. So stretching and walking I do because I must!

Pat



## ✓ Benefits for everyone

Even if you had surgery many years ago or had reversal surgery there are still many benefits to doing the movements in this programme.

It is simply a way to help you regain your health, fitness and confidence at any time after stoma surgery. You may find the pelvic floor exercises on page 20 particularly useful.

Start with the foundation Green Phase 1 and progress as you feel stronger and more confident.

∴ In fact, most of the movements in this programme are good practice for everyone. You could ask your partner, friend or family member to do the programme with you, they will benefit too.



If you have your stoma due to cancer, you may have additional concerns and activity may not feel like a priority. However, there is growing evidence that being less sedentary, both during cancer treatment and afterwards, is really beneficial and to be recommended.

Moving more can help you feel better about yourself, improve your diagnosis, help to manage treatment side effects and improve your mental health.<sup>[10]</sup>

Recommendations published in 2016 by Macmillan<sup>[12]</sup> suggest that anyone with a cancer diagnosis should aim to be active if they can.

Previous advice to 'rest up' is now considered outdated, and people with cancer are being encouraged to move more and to engage in small amounts of activity if at all possible. In addition, being active can help reduce and manage the side effects and long term consequences of treatment such as fatigue, muscle loss and weight gain.

And of course physical activity is a great way to help improve your quality of life and mental health, right at

the point where you need it most.

But we know it's not always easy and your treatment and surgery may leave you feeling very fatigued and unwell.

But even small amounts of movement, such as going for a walk, a gentle bike ride or swim, some mobility and light conditioning exercises at home or doing a bit of gardening or active housework can make all the difference.

You can find some excellent resources (including a home based exercise DVD) about physical activity and the 'Move More' programme at [www.macmillan.co.uk](http://www.macmillan.co.uk)

For your core and abdominal muscles after

stoma surgery you can follow Green Phase 1 and progress when you're ready.

Please speak with your oncologist, nurse or GP about what sort of physical activity is most appropriate for you during your treatment and recovery.

You may be eligible to access your local cancer rehabilitation programme. Speak to your doctor or stoma nurse to find out if there's a programme within your hospital or local community.

In addition, you may be able to access your local GP or exercise referral scheme. Ask your GP for advice and for a referral. More advice is available at [www.macmillan.co.uk](http://www.macmillan.co.uk)

# 9 ✓ Parastomal hernia

You may have heard about a complication known as a ‘parastomal’ hernia

This is an abnormal bulge around the stoma, where an extra loop of bowel squeezes through between the stoma and abdominal wall – and sits between the skin and the muscle of the abdominal wall. It’s thought that around 20-30% of people develop a parastomal hernia,

and of those around 25% require further surgery<sup>[11,12]</sup>.

However, developing a parastomal hernia is not a foregone conclusion and there are lots of things you can do to reduce your risk<sup>[15]</sup>:

## Things you can do to reduce your risk:<sup>[15]</sup>

**Manage your weight.** Being overweight is one of the biggest causes of parastomal hernia as it causes intra-abdominal pressure to push on the abdominal wall. So try to maintain a healthy weight and if you’re overweight, try to lose weight.

### Stop smoking

**Strengthen your abdominal muscles** – people with weak abdominal muscles are more likely to get a hernia, so it’s important to do some appropriate abdominal exercises.

**Wear a light support garment** if it helps you feel more confident to be more active.

**Stay active** to maintain general physical wellbeing.

**Maintain strong muscles** generally (especially your arms) which will help you lift and move more safely, therefore protecting your abdomen.

**When you lift or carry anything**, do it safely and with good technique.

**Adapt exercises** and daily activities to make sure they’re appropriate.

**Speak to your surgeon or stoma nurse** for more advice about reducing your risk of parastomal hernia.





*A pal of mine encouraged me to get out walking every day during my chemotherapy treatment. He used to come with me and kept me motivated even on the days when it was hard. Positive support from a friend or family member is really important... ask someone to encourage and support you when the going gets tough.*

Billy



## Becoming more active

As you start to feel stronger it's a great idea to think about how you can become more active.

Looking after yourself and doing some exercise can be a great way to take care of your long term health, to help you feel better and to help you enjoy all that life has to offer.

There are some important general benefits to being physically active<sup>[13]</sup>, especially after illness and stoma surgery:

- Helps with balance, co-ordination and muscle strength, which can prevent falls and injuries
- Can help reduce side effects of illness and cancer treatment such as fatigue, muscle loss and weight changes

- Improves mental wellbeing and reduces stress, anxiety and depression
- Reduces your risk of other conditions such as cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke
- Can help you survive a cancer diagnosis and reduce the risk of the disease coming back
- Appropriate muscle strengthening for your abdominal wall can help reduce the risk of developing a hernia
- It's good for you and makes you feel great!

People with stomas do all sorts of physically active jobs, compete in sports and take part in physical activities. Have a look at our community pages at [www.convatec.co.uk/meplus](http://www.convatec.co.uk/meplus) for stories about our advocate team.

You really can do anything you like... whether it's gardening, cycling, ballroom dancing, climbing mountains, zumba, running marathons or simply just walking the dog.

Just do what you enjoy. There are so many health benefits to being active and your stoma shouldn't hold you back.

### Hydration

If you have an ileostomy, you may need to consider your fluid intake more carefully especially as you become more active. Having an ileostomy means you'll lose more fluid through your stoma and it's easy to become dehydrated. You may need to increase your intake of fluid and electrolytes appropriately<sup>[14]</sup>. You can download our hydration leaflet from the me+™ website for some top tips and advice about hydration with an ileostomy and physical activity or call 0800 467 866 to request your me+™ Hydration Pack.

### Sports and Exercise

There are many people with stomas who successfully take part in triathlons, contact sports, ultra-endurance

running events, adventure racing, body building, mountaineering and extreme sports. Nothing is off limits if done safely, with good technique and with appropriate precautions.

It is generally advised to exercise some caution with certain movements and activities, especially if you are higher risk for development of a hernia. In particular try to avoid anything that might cause excessive intra-abdominal pressure.

Intra-abdominal pressure increases when you strain, lift heavy weights, cough, laugh, brace, hold your breath or do certain movements/exercises, especially heavy lifting or bracing positions and certain abdominal exercises. Of course it's impossible to avoid laughing, sneezing and coughing, and many daily activities involve lifting and carrying. So there are two main goals:

1. **Aim to strengthen** your abdominal wall so you can withstand intra-abdominal pressures (from laughing, coughing, sneezing and general lifestyle activities). Think of this as creating your own 'inbuilt support'.
2. **Avoid 'excessive'** intra-abdominal pressures caused by inappropriate movements such as certain abdominal exercises, heavy/awkward lifting and by being overweight.

When you do an activity, try to perform it with good technique and in a way which protects your abdomen.

The stronger your tummy muscles get the more you'll be able to withstand intra-abdominal pressures.

### Popular fitness exercises which may not be suitable for people with stomas include<sup>[15]</sup>

- **Plank exercise** – this is a popular 'core exercise' but may not be appropriate for anyone with a stoma as it increases intra-abdominal pressure.
- **Full press ups** – these can cause high intra-abdominal pressure. Adapt them by doing them on your knees or do a bench press (lying on your back) instead.
- **Traditional 'sit ups' or crunches**, especially if both feet are lifted off the floor can place strain on the abdominal wall and should be avoided.
- **Any double leg lift exercise** where your feet are off the floor. Even some pilates movements such as the 'hundred' and the 'table top' exercise may need to be adapted so your feet are on the floor.
- **Full pull/chin ups** place a lot of pressure on the abdomen and increase intra-abdominal pressure and may not be appropriate.
- **Fit ball roll outs**, pikes and roll downs in pilates. Be cautious with any sort of movement which creates an abdominal bulge or a feeling of pressure.

If you're not sure what these exercise are, ask a physiotherapist or exercise specialist for advice.



# 11 Quick tips

**Talk to your nurse or surgeon** before commencing this programme and ask for them to support you through it. Or contact one of our nurse advisors on 0800 085 2516

**Work through the 'recovery movements'** in your own time... starting with Green Phase 1 and progressing through Blue Phase 2 to Purple Phase 3 as you get stronger and fitter

**You don't have to do all the movements** all at once. Just work through them, find out what works well, and mix and match the moves to suit your needs and lifestyle - a bit like a 'recovery menu'

**Make notes in your 'recovery diary'** for you to look back on for motivation and encouragement

**Think about an 'active' recovery** rather than a 'sedentary or passive one' as this will help your recovery

**Get out walking** as soon as you can after your surgery and gradually build it up so you're walking daily

**Find the balance** between 'rest' and 'being active' and listen to your body

**Strengthen your pelvic floor** muscles – especially if you're preparing for a reversal surgery

**Be patient...** it can take many months to make a full recovery

**Gradually increase** the amount of physical activity you do and find ways to include exercise in your lifestyle

**Adapt any movements** or exercises to reduce intra-abdominal pressure and move safely



Remember:  
Stay positive,  
get healthy and  
keep moving!

Good luck.

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## NURSE ADVISOR HELPLINE

Our Nurse Advisor Helpline is free and confidential and there to help you with any questions or concerns regarding your stoma, appliance or surgery. Please feel free to call at any time on **0800 085 2516**.

## PLEASE NOTE:

If you have any queries or concerns, speak to your surgeon, GP, stoma nurse or a physiotherapist for more advice. The advice in this handbook does not replace the advice given by a healthcare professional.

If you have an open wound, infection or wound that hasn't healed yet, then do not start the programme yet, but wait for your wounds to fully heal.

If you have another medical condition or are concerned about doing any of the movements or following the advice given in this programme, then please speak to your surgeon, nurse or GP.

me+™ The Lifestyle Programme to belong to..  
find out more at [www.convatec.co.uk/meplus](http://www.convatec.co.uk/meplus)

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**The Horder Centre**, Crowborough, East Sussex  
[www.horderhealthcare.co.uk](http://www.horderhealthcare.co.uk)



# Notes

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We're here to help you

Reach out whenever you need insights, ideas or just someone to listen.

For more information visit [www.convatec.co.uk/meplus](http://www.convatec.co.uk/meplus)

Or call **0800 467 866**

Freephone Nurse Advisor Line: **0800 085 2516**

Our friendly Stoma Care Nurse Advisor is just a phone call away



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