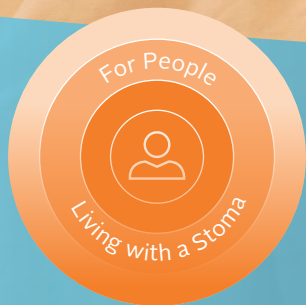


# A clear guide to intimacy after stoma surgery



# Intimacy is for everyone

Speak to a stoma nurse today

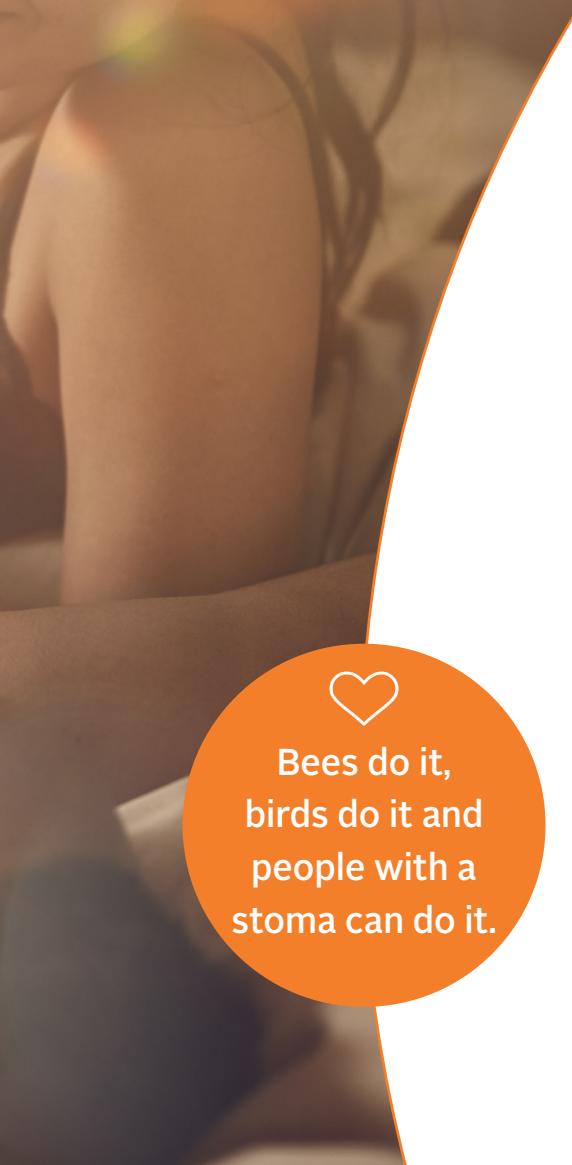


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Bees do it,  
birds do it and  
people with a  
stoma can do it.

Although it's normal to feel sensitive about how a stoma changes your body, meaningful and fulfilling intimate encounters can still be part of you and your life.

Your stoma shouldn't stop you from having a sex life and enjoying intimacy.

In this guide, we'll be sharing essential tips and advice to help you enjoy fulfilling sex and tender intimacy with your partner.

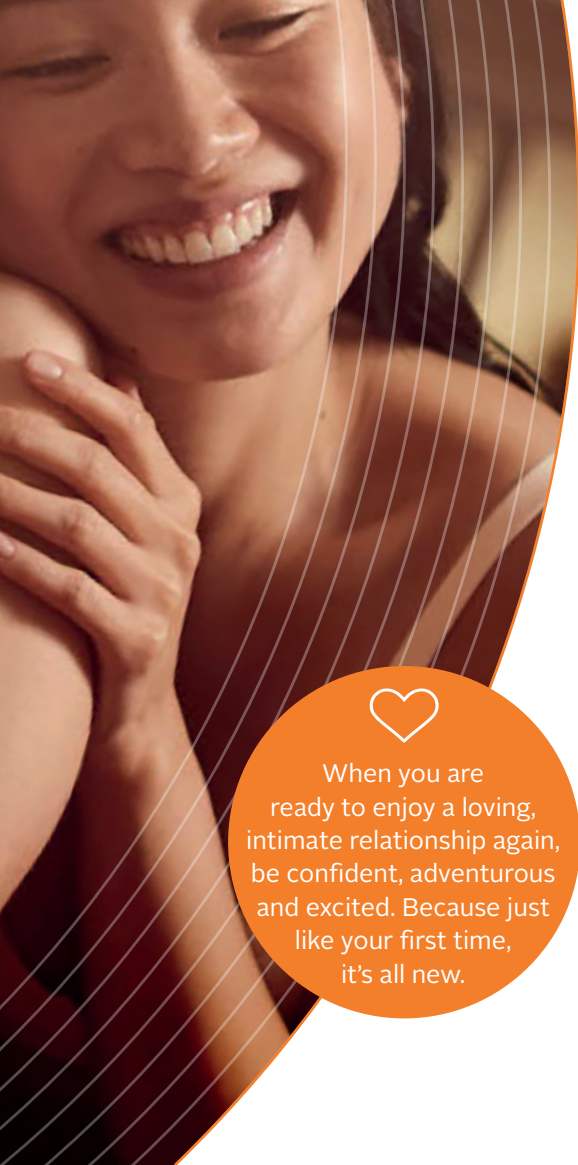


A close-up photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a white ribbed tank top, smiling warmly. She is embracing another person whose face is partially visible on the right. The background is a soft, warm, out-of-focus brown. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

# What does intimacy really mean?...

and common concerns  
surrounding intimacy





When you are ready to enjoy a loving, intimate relationship again, be confident, adventurous and excited. Because just like your first time, it's all new.

**Intimacy is all about trust.** The more you share about your stoma, how you feel, and what you need, the stronger the bond between you and your partner. Remember, intimacy and sex after stoma surgery should be seen as a positive experience not only for you, but your partner too.

Communication from both sides is key to reducing fears and anxieties around intimacy following stoma surgery. With time and love, you can enjoy a mutually satisfying sexual relationship.

As part of the healing process, it's important that you take time after surgery to acknowledge the changes your body has been through, nurture your emotions and share your feelings with your partner.

You might be concerned about damaging your stoma in some way. Let us put your mind at rest, sexual relations should not hurt your stoma or you. Since there are no nerve endings attached to your stoma, it will not transmit pain or any other sensation. Occasionally it may bleed slightly if irritated or rubbed, but a simple change of position will help avoid any issues.

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# If you're not ready, don't rush

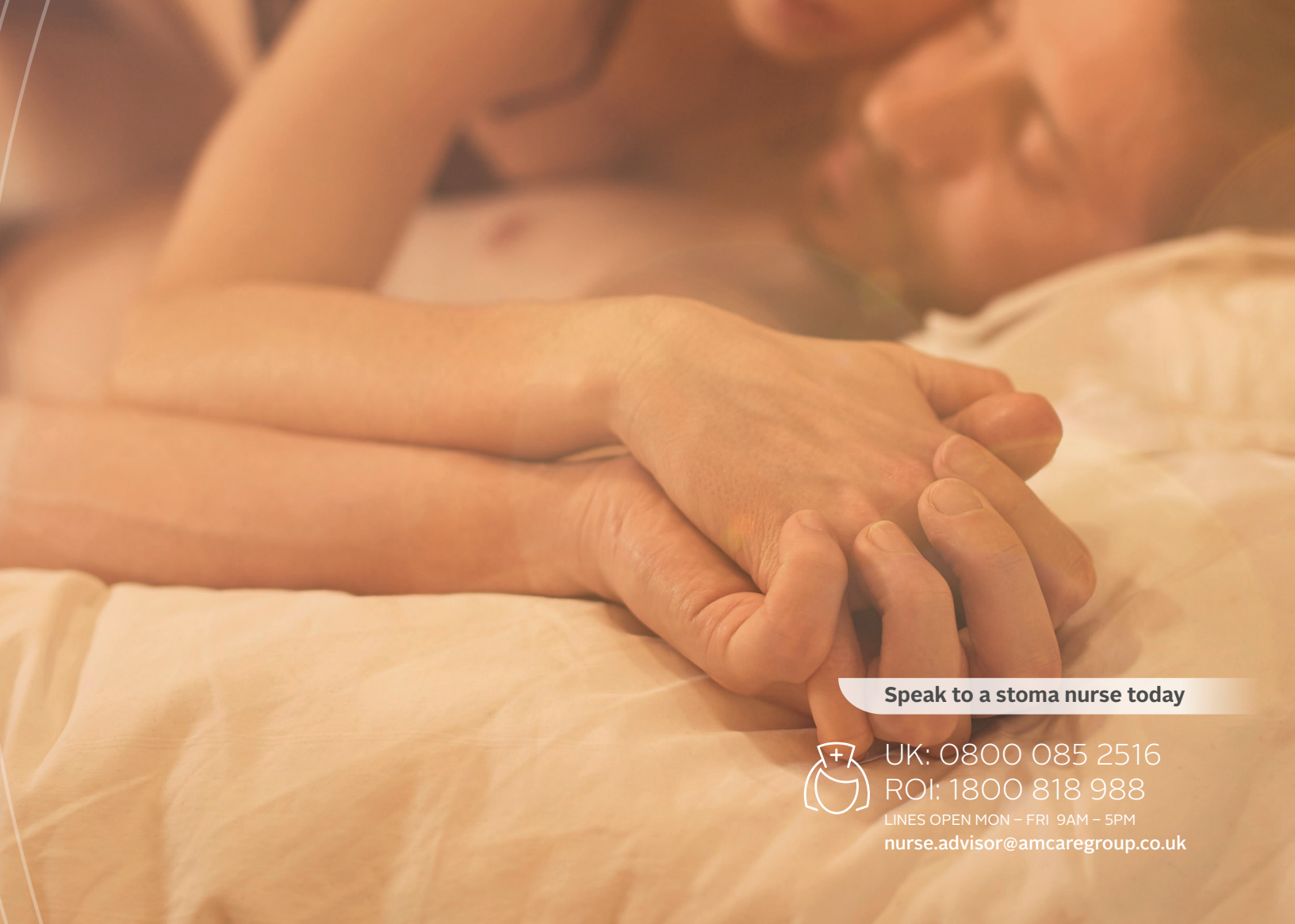
For some people, intimacy is the first thing they want to know about post-surgery, while for others it's the last thing on their minds.

That's fine – everyone is different, and the main thing is that you enjoy sex again only when you feel ready.

There's no rush. Taking a gradual approach to resuming intimacy and not setting your initial expectations too high may help you feel more comfortable and confident.



If you're struggling with body-image, it might just take some time before you accept your stoma and feel comfortable being naked around somebody else.



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# Let's talk about sex...

Communication is key when it comes to re-establishing your sexual relationship, whether you're married, in a new relationship or if you're single and looking for a partner.

**Make time to talk.** If you get an opportunity before surgery, then this may be a good time to start talking about intimacy with your partner. Let them know your initial worries and concerns and ask them to share theirs too.

**Share your experiences openly and honestly.** You've been through a lot with your condition, surgery and recovery, so it's important to talk about your feelings and not bottle things up. Ensuring you and your partner are communicating openly is key to quashing any anxieties you may have.

**Don't put too much pressure on yourselves.** There's no need to set timelines or unrealistic expectations. A kiss and a cuddle at bed time is a good place to start building intimacy again following surgery. Listen to your body and take things one step at a time.

**Use humour.** Stomas might make noises, you might think there's a smell, but things like this can happen to anyone, stoma or not. Your partner loves you for who you are, not whether you have a stoma.

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# Things to talk about



If anything is worrying you, talk to your partner straight away, it doesn't pay to let things fester. You both have a part to play and honesty is the best policy.

**GLEN,  
COUNTY DURHAM  
(MARRIED AND HAS  
AN ILEOSTOMY)**



**GLEN'S  
TOP TIP**

**Fears and anxieties**  
(odour, leakage,  
self-consciousness,  
worried about under-  
performing)

**Physical effects  
of surgery,**  
e.g. erectile  
dysfunction, pain.

**How you'll need  
to prepare before  
having sex,** e.g.  
emptying bag,  
folding bag up.

**What sexual activities  
you would/wouldn't  
like to do** (different  
positions that may help,  
positions to reduce  
any discomfort.

**Any other emotions  
or feelings** that may  
be getting in the  
way of being able  
to enjoy intimacy.





# Being single and finding a partner

Telling someone you have a stoma can be hard enough, but if it's someone you are attracted to it can be even more difficult.

“ If you meet your partner after surgery, it's important to find the right time to tell them about your stoma. My advice would be to tell them earlier on, but only when you feel ready. They may not have heard of a stoma before, so explain it to them, the surgery and how it affects you. Give them a chance to ask questions, too. And remember, some relationships just don't work out, stoma or not, so don't blame it on your stoma. The right person is out there for you.

KEVIN HAYLES | STOMA NURSE

“

If you tell someone new that you have a stoma and it puts them off, then they clearly weren't the right person for you.

RACHEL FROM KENT,  
ILEOSTOMY SINCE 2016



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A romantic scene of a couple in bed. A woman is leaning over a man who is lying in bed. She has her hand on his chest. The lighting is warm and intimate. A white curved line arches over the couple.

# Issues for men and women

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The most common issues reported to us from men and women following stoma surgery is the pressure of feeling they must get back to resuming intimate relationships straight away, and a fear of disappointing their partner. Including your partner and making sure they are involved early on can really help bring you closer together.

### Issues for women

Vaginal dryness issues can be helped by using lubrication products which are now available in many supermarkets. Lubricants can also help with pain as they will reduce the friction against the scar tissue caused by surgery. You can also ask your doctor about other options to treat vaginal dryness.

If you use the pill, you may need to change your birth control, particularly if you have an ileostomy. Oral contraceptives are often not absorbed with a shorter small intestine. Talk to your doctor or stoma care nurse about the best form of birth control for you.

**DID YOU KNOW?** Strengthening your pelvic floor muscles can really help you enjoy more satisfying intercourse. Our me+™ recovery programme features a host of gentle recovery movements to help you reconnect with your abdominal muscles after surgery. Give us a call on **0800 467866** to find out more.



### Issues for men

Erectile dysfunction - Some men may experience erectile dysfunction symptoms (e.g., achieving/sustaining an erection or inability to ejaculate) the first time they are intimate following surgery.

If you do experience any erectile dysfunction, it may be short term depending on the type of surgery you have undergone. Again, communication with your partner can help to reduce any anxieties around this issue. You may wish to contact your consultant, nursing team or GP who will be able to offer advice and reassurance. It is also important to share your feelings with your partner to help reduce any worries you may have. If your surgery is a planned procedure, your consultant and nursing team may well discuss any possible erectile issues prior to your operation.



# Pregnancy with a stoma

Many women with a stoma worry that pregnancy will be an issue after surgery, but in the vast majority of cases, it shouldn't be. Most women are able to enjoy a very typical pregnancy experience.

## Some key things to remember about pregnancy:

### Fertility

Having a stoma shouldn't affect your fertility (however the condition that led to your stoma might). Speak to your stoma nurse or GP if you are thinking about trying for a baby.

### Diet

Generally, dietary advice if you're pregnant and have a stoma is the same as it is for women without a stoma. Maintaining a healthy diet throughout pregnancy is important for anyone, stoma or no stoma.

There's no need to eat for two during pregnancy, but increasing certain foods such as proteins is recommended. Always follow information from your midwifery team. If there is a particular food that you know didn't agree with you before pregnancy, then this should be avoided.

### Hydration

This is key during pregnancy to help avoid kidney infections. Rehydration solutions such as Dioralyte are recommended.

### Body Changes

During pregnancy, you might notice that your stoma protrudes more than it normally does. Try not to be alarmed - the stoma should return to its normal size afterwards. The stoma should return to its normal size afterwards.

You will need to make sure to measure your stoma more often during pregnancy. You may need to alter your pouching system as the abdomen changes in size and shape.

Your stoma will usually return to its usual size about 4 weeks after pregnancy.

## Delivery

The preferred method of delivery will always be vaginal, even if the rectum has been removed. Most doctors want to avoid a caesarean delivery because of the scar tissue which may have formed due to surgery.

The vast majority of people go on to enjoy the joys of childbirth and parenthood after stoma surgery. However, if there's anything you're struggling with or have questions about, please contact our Nurse Advisor Line on **0800 085 2516** or your current stoma nurse team who will be happy to help.

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A photograph of two women embracing in bed, with the text 'Sexual orientation' overlaid in white. The background is a warm, dimly lit room with a lamp visible in the distance.

# Sexual orientation

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Whatever your gender and sexual orientation, there are so many different ways of expressing and enjoying intimate moments including holding hands, hugging, kissing, cuddling and lots more.

For gay men and women, having a stoma should not present any more challenges than it would for a heterosexual person, it may just be a case of expressing intimacy in different ways.

If prior to surgery, the rectum was used as part of intercourse, removal of the rectum can sometimes cause stress. This is why it's important to speak to your surgeon about your concerns before surgery as there is a chance they may be able to discuss the possibility of keeping the rectum intact.

Whether you're male or female, there are lots of alternate forms of intimacy and sexual expression that you can try. After all, intimacy is much more than intercourse. Consider introducing sex toys, masturbation, oral sex and sexual enhancers into the bedroom, which both you and your partner can enjoy.



### Warning

The stoma should not be used at any time for penetrative intimate moments. Doing so may cause damage to the stoma and could result in more surgery.

# Top tips for enjoying intimacy

Enjoying intimacy when you've got a stoma is anything but boring! To give you some added inspiration, we've put together a few tips and advice.

- **Get in the mood** – by getting confident and comfortable. Make sure you empty your pouch beforehand.
- **Lubrication and stimulation** – following surgery, when resuming intimacy it is often recommended to use a good quality lubricant to reduce any discomfort. Remember, intimacy does not have to involve penetration. Often, it is helpful to use toys to help sensitivity return to the sexual organs.
- **Watch what you eat** – thinking about what you eat before getting intimate can help reduce gas production. Foods that may trigger gas include spicy and fatty foods, beans, chewing gum and fizzy drinks.

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## Positions

- **Try something new** - the side-by-side position (man behind the woman ("spooning")), often works well because the pouch will fall to your side and not come between you and your partner and there won't be any weight placed on the stoma.
- **Get creative** – now you've more reasons than ever to try out different positions!

## Ostomy products to help with intimacy

There are so many products available today that can help you to feel at ease when getting intimate with your partner.

- **Feel sexy** – you could cover your pouch with specially designed underwear and lingerie, which also helps to hold the bag in place during intimate moments.
- **Fun under the covers** – there are range of intimate ostomy covers and wraps available to help you focus on your enjoyment and not your stoma.
- **Size is everything** – swap your regular bag for a smaller, more intimate one that will be less intrusive.



# Don't feel awkward

We're always here when you need us. If you're struggling and need someone to talk to, our team of dedicated stoma counsellors are just a phone call away through our Nurse Advisor Line. We can also offer free lifestyle advice, support on products as well as help with any clinical matters you may have.



Medical  
Support

## Nurse Advisor Line

UK: 0800 085 2516  
ROI: 1800 818 988



Lifestyle  
Advice

## me+™ Advisors

UK: 0800 467 866  
ROI: 1800 721 721



Product  
Choice

## Product Specialists

UK: 0800 282 254  
ROI: 1800 721 721



0800 328 4257



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0138 643 0140