

# Rectal Discharge After Ostomy Surgery

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## *What You Need to Know and Do*

### What is rectal discharge?

Rectal discharge is common after colon and rectal surgery with an ostomy. This discharge is usually caused by mucus. The colon and rectum produce mucus for protection and to help with the passage of stool.

In some ostomy surgeries, the colon and/or rectum are left in place. The remaining parts of the colon and rectum continue to make mucus which is passed through the rectum.

### How much discharge will I have?

The mucus can build up, and either leak from the rectum or dry up into a ball which may cause discomfort. The frequency of discharge ranges from every few weeks to several times a day.

The length of colon that remains will vary. The longer the colon that remains, the more mucus there is likely to be. The mucus varies from clear to brown in color. It may be liquid, sticky, or formed.

### What can I do to manage the discharge?

One way to manage the discharge is to sit on the toilet and gently push down as if having a bowel movement. This may remove any mucus in the rectum and keep it from forming into a ball.

Pelvic strengthening exercises can help strengthen muscles that control the leakage of mucus. You may want to use pads to protect your clothing.

It is possible the mucus will irritate or cause itching around the anus. You can use a barrier skin cream like Calmoseptine or Desitin. You may need to try a few different creams before you find one that works for you.

Wash the area gently with plain water or use a moist wipe made for sensitive skin. Do not use wipes with fragrance since these usually have alcohol which can irritate skin. Pat your skin dry to avoid irritation. Reapply your barrier cream after the skin has dried if you need to.

Contact your doctor if you have rectal bleeding and pain. This may be a sign of infection or tissue damage.