

# A guide to intimacy after ostomy surgery



**ConvaTec**



Throughout your entire ostomy journey, me+™ is here to give you the support, insights and products you need.

# Intimacy is for everyone

Speak to an ostomy nurse today



1-800-422-8811  
M-F, 8:30am-7:00pm  
email: [cic@convatec.com](mailto:cic@convatec.com)



Bees do it,  
birds do it and  
people with an  
ostomy can do it.

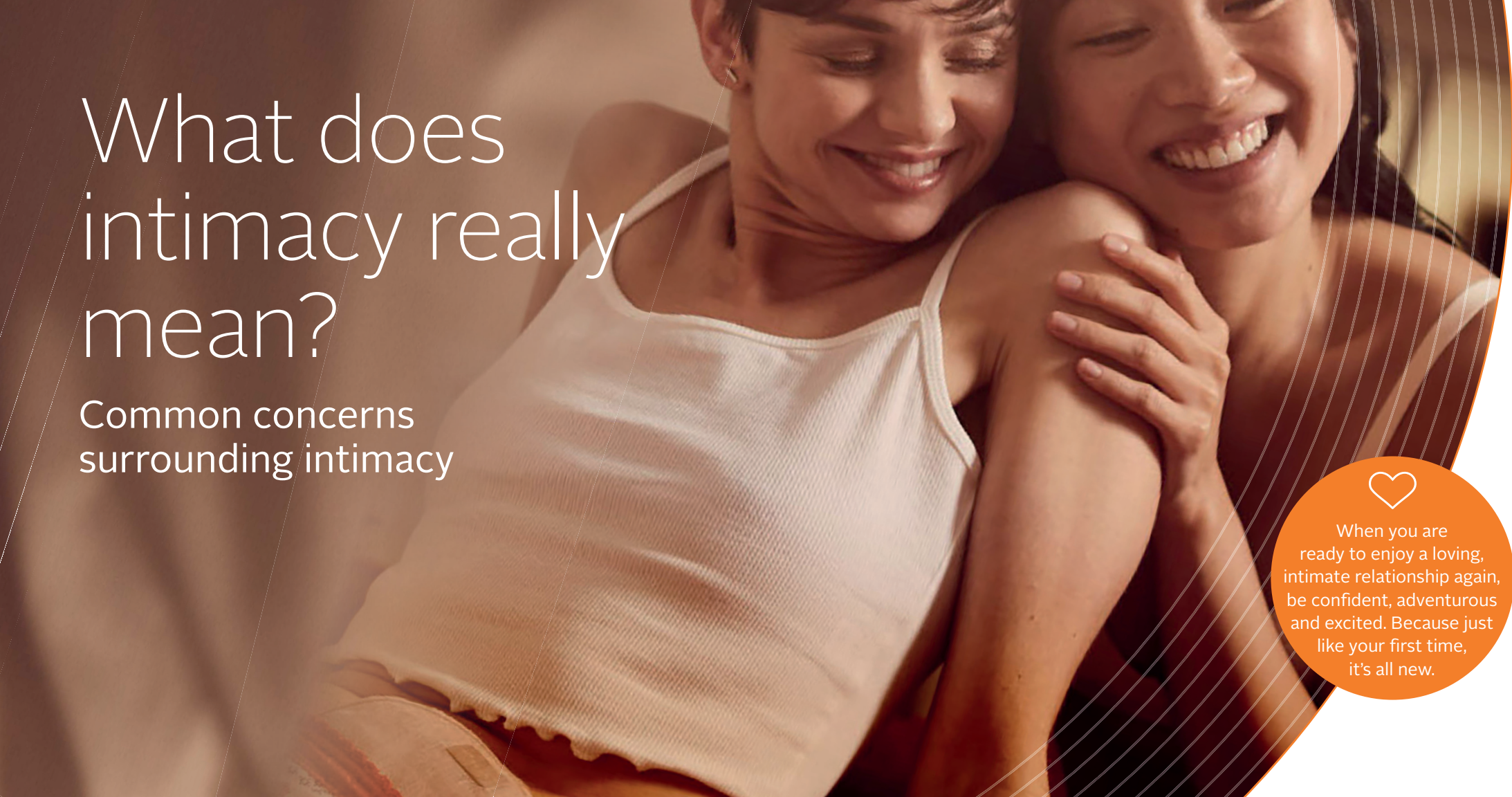
Although it's normal to feel sensitive about how an ostomy changes your body, meaningful and fulfilling intimate encounters can still be part of you and your life.

Your ostomy shouldn't stop you from having a sex life and enjoying intimacy with your partner.

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

# What does intimacy really mean?

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 ostomy, how you feel, and what you need, the stronger the bond between you and your partner. Remember, intimacy and sex after ostomy 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 ostomy 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 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 ostomy 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 easing any anxieties you may have.

**Don't put too much pressure on you and your partner.** 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.

**Keep it real.** Ostomies might make noises, you might think there's a smell, but things like this can happen to anyone, ostomy or not. Your partner is with you for you, not whether or not you have an ostomy.

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## Things to talk about



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

**GLEN**  
LIVING WITH  
AN ILEOSTOMY



**GLEN'S  
TOP TIP**

**Fears and anxieties**  
(odor, 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 an ostomy can be hard enough, but if it's someone you are attracted to it can be even more difficult.

- Find the right time to tell a potential partner about your ostomy.
- Don't feel like you have to tell them on the first date. You can share about your ostomy when you're ready, but generally earlier is usually better than later.
- Explain about the surgery you've had and how it affects you. Give them a chance to ask questions.
- Some relationships just don't work out – ostomy or not.

The right person is out there for you.

“

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

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# Issues for men and women

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The most common issues reported to us from men and women following ostomy surgery is the pressure of feeling they must get back to resuming intimate relationships right 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 available in many stores. 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 ostomy care nurse about the best form of birth control for you.



## 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 doctor or ostomy nurse 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 nursing team may discuss any possible erectile issues prior to your operation.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Strengthening your pelvic floor muscles can really help you enjoy more satisfying intercourse. Our me+™ recovery program features a series of gentle recovery movements to help you reconnect with your abdominal muscles after surgery.



Scan to visit the me+™ recovery series homepage or give us a call at **1-800-422-8811** to find out more.

# Pregnancy with an ostomy

Many women with an ostomy 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 an ostomy shouldn't affect your fertility (however the condition that led to your surgery might). Speak to your ostomy nurse or doctor if you are thinking about trying for a baby.

### Diet

Generally, dietary advice if you're pregnant and have an ostomy is the same as it is for women without an ostomy. Maintaining a healthy diet throughout pregnancy is important for anyone, ostomy or not.

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

### Hydration

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

### Body Changes

During pregnancy, you might notice that your ostomy protrudes more than it normally does. Try not to be alarmed – it 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 ostomy surgery. However, if there's anything you're struggling with or have questions about, please contact your doctor or speak to one of our ostomy nurses at **1-800-422-8811**.

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# 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 an ostomy 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 have an ostomy is anything but boring! To give you some added inspiration, we've put together a few tips and advice.

- **Get in the mood** – feel confident and get 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 personal 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 carbonated 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 have 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 pouch for a smaller, more intimate one that will be less intrusive. You may want to try a smaller, closed-end pouch



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# 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 ostomy nurses are just a phone call away. We can also offer free lifestyle advice, support on products as well as help with any clinical matters you may have.



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