

Colostomy

What is a Colostomy?

A colostomy is when part of the large intestine is brought through to the outside of the belly and attached there. The baby then poops through the protruding part (called a stoma). A colostomy bag is then attached to the belly (with stickers) to collect the stool (poop, bowel movement).

Because the intestine is now coming through the belly, the baby will not have bowel movements through his/her bottom.

For this handout, we are referring to colostomies. There are also ileostomies, where the small intestine is brought through in the same fashion, and generally cared for in the same way.

Why does my baby need a colostomy?

Your baby may need a colostomy for a variety of reasons. Some of the main reasons are: a blockage in the intestine or anus, or part of the bowel has died and that portion needs to be taken out. Your physician will discuss with you the reason for the colostomy. The placement of a colostomy is a surgical procedure and your baby will be brought to the operating room and put to sleep with anesthesia so he/she doesn't feel anything.

How long will my baby need the colostomy?

The intestine is usually 'put back together' when the baby has bigger and older. For some babies, this is needed for 6-18 months. Depending on the reason for the colostomy, some babies will have a colostomy for shorter or longer periods of time.

What does the stoma look like?

Remember that the stoma is the protruding part through the belly. It will be about as round as a nickel or quarter, but may get bigger the longer that the baby has it. It will protrude from the belly about a quarter of an inch, and again may be more the longer that the baby has it. It will be a beefy red color like the inside of your mouth. It is normal for the stoma to occasionally bleed.

Doesn't the stoma hurt?

The intestine has no nerves, so touching the stoma does not hurt the baby.

How will my baby poop?

After surgery, once your baby starts to have bowel movements again, the stoma will be covered with an ostomy bag. There are a variety of sizes and style of bags made especially for babies. Your baby will poop through the stoma and not from his/her bottom. The stool will collect in the bag. Stool from ostomies are not usually as formed as normal stools from their bottom. Many times it is softer and more liquidy.

The stool should be removed from the bag a few times a day. The bag should be changed whenever it is leaking. Stool that leaks onto the skin can cause breakdown of the skin.

Will my baby be able to have normal activity with a colostomy?

Having a colostomy should not limit your baby's activity. Treat your baby as you would if he/she didn't have the colostomy. Your baby will be able to wear regular clothes, bathe, lay on his/her belly when awake, etc.

How do I take care of the colostomy at home?

Before your baby is discharged home, you will be shown how to care for your baby's colostomy. The doctors and nurses will make sure that you are comfortable in caring for your baby.