

The Ultimate Guide to Exercise With A Stoma



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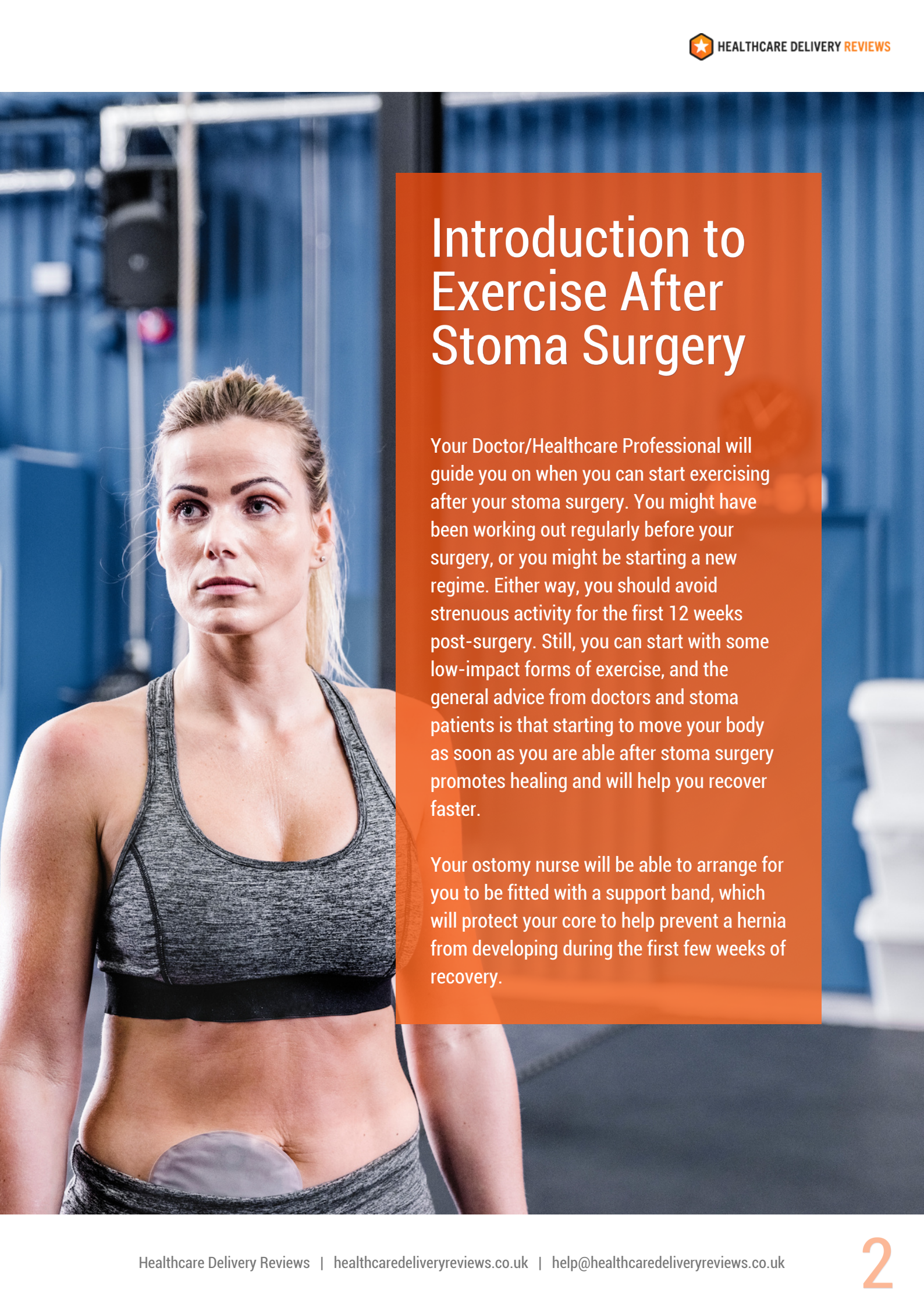
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A woman with blonde hair tied back, wearing a grey sports bra and leggings, stands in a gym. She has a stoma on her lower abdomen. The background shows gym equipment and blue walls.

Introduction to Exercise After Stoma Surgery

Your Doctor/Healthcare Professional will guide you on when you can start exercising after your stoma surgery. You might have been working out regularly before your surgery, or you might be starting a new regime. Either way, you should avoid strenuous activity for the first 12 weeks post-surgery. Still, you can start with some low-impact forms of exercise, and the general advice from doctors and stoma patients is that starting to move your body as soon as you are able after stoma surgery promotes healing and will help you recover faster.

Your ostomy nurse will be able to arrange for you to be fitted with a support band, which will protect your core to help prevent a hernia from developing during the first few weeks of recovery.



STAGE 1

Building Your Strength

Gentle Forms of Exercise

Following your surgery, your core will be weak, and you might not feel like doing any exercise. It's understandable to feel worried about your stoma, whether it's safe and secure, having low stamina and your general recovery. You might not be mentally ready to start being active again, but if you can manage to start moving your body in some way, however small, it will help your recovery.

When you feel ready and your healthcare team give you the go-ahead, you could try these more gentle activities to start to build balance and strength, as well as your confidence.

Always be guided by your body and how you feel. Exercise doesn't always have to be pushing yourself to the limits, just moving and gentle stretches are all useful - don't be hard on yourself if that's all you feel like doing!

[This video from Hannah Witton](#) has some very good advice for starting to exercise after having stoma surgery.

The next pages look at some potential lower-impact exercises you could try to help get moving.



Walking

You can build a good level of fitness from regular walking. It doesn't take long before you are able to increase the distance and perhaps walk at speed. Well-known advice has been to aim for 10,000 per day, but more recent studies have indicated that the number of steps is dependent on your age, and fewer steps may be adequate to maintain a good level of activity which will benefit you physically and improve your sense of well-being too. See this report from [Holland & Barrett](#) for more information on your recommended steps per day, based on your age.

Start off with a short walk around the block, or a circuit of your local park, and it won't be long before you are able to walk for longer periods of time. This will start to rebuild your core strength and fitness. Walking Apps are a good way to plan your walks and track your progress, and they can be a great way to discover new places.

WALKING APPS			
Map My Walk	Free with optional paid for extras	Easy to use app which will record your route, speed and elevation, so you can see how you improve over time	https://www.mapmywalk.com/
Go Jauntly	Free with optional paid for extras	Walking tours based on your location, so you can discover new places to go wherever you are	https://www.gojauntly.com/
The Conqueror	Paid for	Lots of virtual and themed challenges where you can collect specially designed medals for each challenge completed as part of a team or individually	https://www.theconqueror.events/

Swimming

Swimming is one of the best exercises after stoma surgery and beyond. It's low impact but works every part of your body. You can start slowly and build your distance up over time, and you can swim all year round - indoor or outdoor pools, lidos, and of course, the sea if you're feeling brave. It's natural to feel anxious at first, but with a bit of forward planning, there's no reason for you to miss out. Try these simple tips to take the stress out of swimming:

-  1 Choose swimwear you feel comfortable in. You can buy specialist swimwear, but don't feel like you have to. There's no reason why you shouldn't wear any costume, bikini or swim trunks you like. A patterned swimsuit or high-waisted tankini, or swimming trunks will disguise the outline of your bag if that would make you feel more confident. Most people won't even notice regardless!

-  2 Empty your bag beforehand so you can be comfortable.

-  3 Plan to swim when your stomach is empty.

-  4 Cover the filter with a protection sticker (they come with most stoma bags) and remove it when you've finished swimming.

-  5 Don't worry about the adhesive failing, it won't! It's very strong and won't be affected by chlorine or salt water.

-  6 Your stoma bag is completely waterproof and won't degrade no matter how long you're in the water – it won't leak.



Yoga

There are many different types of Yoga, so you should be able to find a form that suits you. You don't need to be super-flexible to practice either, you can simply work at your own pace and start within your comfort zone. This is important, especially after surgery - you don't want to push yourself past your limits.

Practising Yoga in a class can be beneficial because your teacher will be able to guide you through, and you can voice any worries you may have. They'll understand that you need to take things carefully, to begin with, and build your confidence and strength. There are, of course, lots of online classes which are often available for free, and you might want to start with one of these until you feel more comfortable, but be careful not to push too hard or attempt to do the more challenging poses. Stick with a beginner's class until you become stronger.

Pilates

Building your core strength and control through pilates can be hugely beneficial after recovery from stoma surgery. Done correctly, and with the right guidance, pilates can help prevent parastomal hernias and build a sense of control and support within your abdominal muscles. It's important to find the right class for you, as some pilates classes can be extremely challenging and will not be suitable for everyone.

Try [The Ostomy Studio](#) for live and on-demand specific Ostomy Clinical Pilates classes and advice on where to start with all types of exercise.



STAGE 2

Once you're feeling fit again

More Challenging Exercises

After a few months of gradually building up your core strength and stability, you might want to try (or get back to) faster-paced or competitive sports. Lots of ostomy patients say that prioritising their physical health is more important to them than it was pre-surgery. Having been sick and dealing with health issues can sometimes give you the impetus to try new things and stay on top of your fitness and well-being. You might want to move on to higher-impact activities.





Cycling

Whether you fancy a leisurely bike ride in the country or something more high-octane, cycling has something to offer for everyone. You can ride a bike for leisure, or you might want to participate in longer, more challenging rides and even charity cycle events. As with all sports, you should follow your doctor's advice and build your strength at a sensible pace, but if you enjoyed cycling before your surgery, there's no reason why you can't get back to it. Cycling clothes are very supportive for stoma bags (especially bib shorts), and you can carry any additional supplies you may need in a saddlebag.

Indoor cycle trainers such as Zwift, Watt Bike and Peloton mean you don't even have to leave the house to get fit and reach your goals. They also have large communities, so you needn't feel like you are cycling solo and can take part in challenges and even cycle through mountain ranges virtually! Although they can be expensive (especially when first purchasing the equipment), indoor trainers are a good way to build confidence and strength and avoid the cold and wet!



Running

If you want to return to running post-surgery, you can certainly build up to running good distances again. Many ostomy patients take part in running events, including marathons. Have a proper training plan and take things slowly. Alternate walking/running until you can safely run for longer distances. Try the **Couch to 5K** training plan, but always be guided by how you feel, and don't push yourself too hard too soon.

Working out in the gym

Once you're secure in your core and have started to regain your strength, getting back to the gym can be a real pick-me-up, especially if you've been used to training regularly before surgery. Most gyms have qualified instructors who will be able to design and guide you through a routine that suits you and your level of fitness and recovery. You will be able to work at your own pace, and if you feel up to it, why not take advantage of the classes on offer? Being part of a class can be motivating and good fun!



In Summary

Living an active and healthy life is perfectly possible after having stoma surgery - don't let it stop you from doing anything you want to do. Whether it's gardening, hiking, running or playing badminton with your friends, whatever exercise you choose, enjoy it! Here's a summary of quick tips:

- Make sure you take on extra fluid on exercise days to replace what you lose
- Don't overdo it, pace yourself and your recovery
- Listen to your body, and rest if you need to
- If you're not enjoying yourself, try something else!
- Record your fitness journey on an App, so you can see how far you've come
- Plan activities with friends and family
- Join a club or a fitness class
- Always follow the advice of your healthcare team

The advice in this article is for information only and should not replace medical care. Always follow the advice from your GP or healthcare professional before starting a new exercise plan, or diet.



Find Support

If you would like further help and support about a stoma diet then check out the below communities:

Colostomy UK
www.colostomyuk.org

Ileostomy & Internal Pouch Association
www.iasupport.org

Got An Exercise Regime To Share?

If you've got a exercise regime you want to share with the community and feature it in this guide then please send details to:

HELP@HEALTHCAREDELIVERYREVIEWS.CO.UK

