

NEW SERIES

Problematic stomas... Dips and creases

Written by

Melanie Jerome RGN, BSc(Hons), CNS
Amanda Gunning RGN, CNS
Chelsea and Westminster Hospital
NHS Foundation Trust



Picture Courtesy of Coloplast Ltd

It is so important to speak to your stoma care nurse if you are having problems with your stoma. There is an extensive array of products on the market in order to cater for each individual's needs. Therefore, finding the right product for you is essential. The following article will highlight some common problems and outline some of the solutions.

Ideally the pouch change should be as simple as possible. However, any complications with the stoma, leakage or the fear of leakage can cause individuals to curtail their work and social life and may often lead to social isolation. Sometimes the stoma does not sit flush with the surface of the skin; in stoma terms this is known as a peristomal dip, crease or moat. This means that the base of the pouch is unable to sit on a flat skin surface, which leads to difficulty in adherence and instability, causing the bag to leak and the skin around the stoma to become broken and sore.

There are several reasons why you may have dips or creases. The surgery may have been an emergency therefore the stoma care nurse was unable to mark the most appropriate place for the stoma, avoiding abdominal creases, previous scars or bony prominences. There may have been a technical difficulty during surgery, which has caused the abdomen to become uneven. The individual shape of the abdomen may have natural dips and creases and any weight gain or loss will cause the abdomen to change shape, this includes pregnancy.

So what is a peristomal moat?

The word peristomal describes the skin area around the stoma; the moat is a hollow of skin, which may be partially, or fully, around the stoma. The base of the pouch is then unable to adhere to the skin due to the gap produced by the moat. The solution may be to use a washer, or half a washer, to fill the gap and therefore provide a flat surface for the pouch to adhere to. There are many different washers, or seals, available and your stoma care nurse will help you decide which is the most suitable for you.

What is a peristomal skin crease?

Skin creases can occur naturally on the abdomen but become problematic if the stoma is sited within one. Again, this may be due to emergency surgery, or as a result of weight gain/loss. The abdominal skin may then overhang the stoma causing a crease. If this is the case it is very important to use a good technique when applying the pouch e.g. standing and using one hand to pull the abdominal skin taught and using the other hand apply the pouch thus smoothing out skin creases. There are creases that cannot be smoothed out and for those you may require a convex appliance, which your stoma care nurse can assess. The base plate of the convex appliance curves outwards to smooth out creases and fill dips. Convexity must always be prescribed by your stoma care nurse as the pressure may cause bruising or soreness and will require monitoring.

What is a skin dip?

Skin dips are changing contours in the skin. The skin may have become distorted during your surgery and the place where the stoma is formed may pull into a dip, even if your stoma was sited prior to your surgery. There may be one or many dips around your stoma causing difficulty with pouch

adhesion and therefore leakage. Also available is strip paste, which can be handled and moulded like plasticine is sticky and useful to fill in the creases. Paste may also be used on its own or in conjunction with other accessories. Paste comes in a tube, just like toothpaste, and can be squeezed into dips. It is best to damp your fingertip before you touch the paste in order to mould it, as it is very sticky! This will not inhibit the adherence. Some pastes have an alcohol content that may cause slight discomfort on broken areas of skin.

Your stoma care nurse may suggest a two-piece appliance as the added accessories can make the appliance change more time consuming. A two-piece appliance has a separate base plate that attaches directly to your skin. The second part, the pouch, then attaches to the base plate. The pouch can then be changed leaving the base plate on the abdomen. The two-piece system may be useful if you change your appliance frequently throughout the day.

Stoma construction, body contours and personal capabilities (dexterity, eyesight etc) will all contribute to the choice of accessory your stoma care nurse may offer. Seals, convex appliances, strip pastes, paste and two-piece appliances are available from many different companies.

Everyone is different. Your stoma care nurse will provide you with an excellent service based around sound advice and professional expertise helping you to select the appropriate products for your needs. By keeping in touch with your stoma care nurse and up to date with stoma management you can carry out your everyday activities happy in the knowledge that your appliance won't leak - giving you extra confidence!