

# Summer skincare

When temperatures rise, peristomal skin can face a few extra challenges. Gastrointestinal nurse Jennie Burch answers some common questions about managing this delicate area when the heat is on.



Peristomal skincare may not be top priority as you prepare for your summer break, but it can be helpful to know how to nip any troublesome issues in the bud before you go.

## Q: How might peristomal skin react and be remedied on a typical holiday in the sun?



### Chlorine in swimming pools

**A:** Before entering a swimming pool, ideally the stoma bag will have been stuck to the tummy for at least an hour. Sometimes if the bag is just freshly applied, it might not stick as firmly as it would with a bit of extra time. There is no

evidence that pool chlorine should prevent ostomates from making full use of this form of exercise or enjoying a cool dip when visiting somewhere hot. Being in a pool for hours might require a trip to the toilet to empty the bag and check it is still firmly in place, but it's likely that it will be up to the job when you are in the pool.

There are a few tips that can be useful to think about before jumping in the pool. Is the stoma bag empty? If the bag is drainable, it is sensible to empty it before going in the pool. This will mean that it shows less under swimwear.

Is the stoma bag stuck on well or are the edges lifting? If the edges do not feel secure enough for you, speak to your Clinical Nurse Specialist Stoma Care and ask about edging tape, also known as 'bananas' (because of the curved shape) and 'flange extenders'. These sticky strips help secure the stoma bag in place, sticking the edges down more securely.

If you find the flatus filter stops working after swimming, consider using one of the small stickers in the stoma supply box to cover the filter when you are swimming.

Do I feel confident in my swimwear? There is some great swimwear to hide or show your stoma bag, depending on your preference. To hide the bag, consider wearing patterned or printed swimwear, high-waisted bottoms or all-in-one swimwear.

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### In the sea

**A:** The advice when going in the sea is similar to being in a swimming pool, making sure the stoma bag is well stuck on and empty. Remember, Gill Castle swam the English Channel in 2023 with her stoma bag (@stoma\_chameleon).



### Sand on the stoma bag

**A:** Being on a beach with a stoma bag is perfectly safe. It might be uncomfortable, however, if sand gets into the soft covering of the bag as it might cause the skin to itch. However, because the bag is stuck on around the skin, it won't do any

damage to that area. Having a shower after being on the beach should removal all sand from the stoma bag.

### Sunscreen on the stoma bag

**A:** Using sunscreen is important when in the sun and that is no less so on your tummy, near

your stoma. The sunscreen should be put onto the skin after you have put on your stoma bag. Sunscreen under the adhesive of your stoma bag would stop it from sticking on your tummy properly, as will most creams.



### Unfamiliar food and drink

**A:** When away from home, one challenge can be finding food that we like to eat, and this is no less so when you have a stoma. A way to manage eating food you haven't cooked yourself is to think of a few points. Does the food look well cooked? Having a stomach bug is not something anyone wants on holiday, so maybe avoid foods that are known to cause them.



If water isn't safe to drink where you are, is there anything on your plate that might have been washed in that water, such as a salad? If so, don't eat it. Does the drink have ice in?

Consider taking the ice out if you are unsure about the quality of the drinking water.

Incidentally, it's okay to bathe in water that you wouldn't drink. The stoma bag will keep out anything, but the risks exist if your head goes into the water and water into your mouth.



### After consuming alcohol

**A:** When away from home drinking alcohol, there are a few things to consider. One already mentioned: is there ice in the drink? Be cautious if the water is not safe to drink. Alcohol, despite being a liquid, can lead to dehydration particularly the day after drinking it. Drink (safe) water in between glasses of alcohol to keep hydrated and drink a glass before bed. Remember, alcohol can make your stoma more active, so it might need an empty overnight to prevent overfilling.

### If dehydrated

**A:** To prevent dehydration, it is important to drink safe water and about two litres a day is about right for most people. If it is hot, you might sweat more and this means you lose sodium. Try to take a little extra salt each day if you are in a hot environment, unless medically advised not to. Consider taking rehydration solutions with you and take them

either to prevent dehydration or to treat dehydration if it occurs.

How will you know you are dehydrated? Keep an eye on the colour of your pee, which should be clear or a little yellow. Dark pee means you are dehydrated. Do your lips, mouth and tongue feel dry? Have a drink of water. Another sign that means you might be dehydrated is that you feel faint or lightheaded – get into the shade and have regular sips of water. If you do faint, consider seeing a medical professional to have a check-up. Eating a banana a day on holiday can be helpful as they contain nutrients and can help thicken your poo.



### During physical exercise

**A:** Excessive sweating from exercise in a hot environment can cause the adhesive on your stoma bag to be less effective than usual. Be sure to regularly check that the stoma bag is well stuck to your tummy. You can consider using flange extenders as discussed earlier to help stick the edges of your stoma bag securely. Some people find after sweating they need to change their stoma bag, so it is important to always take twice as many stoma bags on holiday with you just in case. Also be



sure to store them away from the heat as this might make them a bit less sticky than usual.

### During/after holiday illness

**A:** Getting food poisoning is never pleasant. You might recognise this by having a tummy ache and cramping in your tummy. Your stoma might be more active than usual – you might also notice some changes in your poo, it might be more liquid or smell different. Other people might be ill too. You might need antibiotics, so



consider seeing a doctor. You are also at risk of dehydration so drink water little and often; consider rehydration solutions that you can buy from the chemist.

It is not advisable to take something to stop the poo like Imodium as this will keep the bugs that made you sick inside your body and make you feel worse.



### Insect bites near the stoma

**A:** In hot weather, it is more likely that you might have an insect bite. We all react differently to bites but try not to scratch. If you get a strong reaction and need an antihistamine cream, just be careful not to put it under the stoma bag as this will stop your bag from sticking as well as usual.

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Do you have any practical holiday tips to share with fellow members – perhaps something discovered by trial and error that has made all the difference? Do let us know at: [editor@iajournal.co.uk](mailto:editor@iajournal.co.uk)