

What is a stoma?

Stoma surgery is used in the treatment of a range of conditions including cancer and Crohn's. It involves diverting the bowel or bladder through a surgically created hole (stoma) in the abdomen, so that bodily waste can be collected in a stoma bag.

It is estimated that one in 550 people in the UK have a stoma. Often referred to as ostomates, these people (who can be adults and children) have a 'hidden' condition. They have additional needs when using the toilet.

What are the issues?

Accessible toilets often lack the facilities to make stoma bag changing safe and easy.

Accessible Toilet signage is frequently misleading. It can inadvertently suggest that the facilities are only for use by people with physical disabilities.

Why make your toilets stoma friendly?

Inadequate accessible toilet facilities act as a form of social exclusion. When an ostomate goes out, they need to be sure that if necessary, they can find a suitably equipped toilet in which to change their stoma bag.

Our research has also revealed that ostomates are often verbally challenged and sometimes even physically assaulted when they use accessible toilets. Poor signage contributes to this problem. Remember, ostomates have a hidden condition.

The stoma friendly toilet

Hooks

- To hang clothing and personal belongings while changing stoma bags.
- British Standards suggest two clothes hooks, one at 1050mm and the other at 1400mm above the floor.

Shelves

- To provide a sanitary surface on which to lay out medical supplies.
- Placement is important. The shelf needs to be positioned so that an ostomate can stand in front of it and access their supplies. We suggest a flip up/down shelf if your toilet is small.
- British Standards suggest a flat topped close-coupled cistern providing a changing surface. For high or low-level cisterns, a separate changing shelf 125mm to 150mm deep and preferably 400mm wide, with its surface 950mm above floor level, should be provided.

Bin

- To enable the disposal of used stoma bags. To avoid embarrassment, this should ideally be located in the toilet cubicle.

Mirror

- Allows ostomates to see their stoma while changing their bag.

Accessible Toilet Signage

- Signage that draws attention to the hidden nature of some conditions and disabilities helps to reduce hostility towards users without an obvious physical impairment.

