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Institute of Sport & Recreation Management

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INFORMATION

Access to sport and recreation opportunities for people using a colostomy bag

Introduction

People who have undergone a colostomy or ileostomy frequently experience a significant positive change in their energy levels and desire to live an active life. They often wish to return to sporting activities they enjoyed before the condition which led to surgery occurred, or take up new interests.

Operators of sport and recreation facilities should do everything they can to assist these users, both in terms of offering practical advice regarding changing rooms, clothing etc and to reassure them that the facility has procedures in place to deal sensitively with any situation which might occur.

Colostomies explained

Colostomies are performed when part of the colon or rectum needs to be removed or bypassed. A temporary colostomy may be needed for a period of time to allow a portion of the colon to heal. Otherwise the procedure is permanent.

Conditions which may lead to a colostomy include:

- Injury, accidents or birth defects
- Diverticulitis
- Inflammatory bowl disease (Crohn's Disease or Ulcerative Colitis)
- Tumour of the colon or rectum

Glossary of terms

Colostomy	*Operation by which part of the colon is bought through an incision in the abdominal wall and formed into an artificial opening to allow the discharge of faeces into a colostomy bag.*
Ileostomy	*Similar surgical procedure to a colostomy involving the lower part of the intestine rather than the colon.*
Stoma	*Precise term for the surgically created orifice, either temporary or permanent, used to externalise faeces.*
Colostomy/ ileostomy bag	*Lightweight bag attached to the skin by adhesive over and around the stoma, allowing the hygienic collection of faeces.*
Ostomate	*Descriptive term for a person who has experienced a colostomy or ileostomy.*

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Physical activity readiness
Ostomates will be aware of the following:

- Most people have different post-operative recovery times, thus an individual should decide for themselves when they feel ready to consider exercise. They may wish to have their stoma nurse check that the stoma surround is fully healed before attempting significant physical exertion.
- Typically, an individual in this situation has recently undergone surgery, preceded by a period of inaction due to their condition and should remember that their physical fitness may be compromised. They should seek advice from an appropriate health professional as to the exercise choices they should make to regain fitness.

Access and changing rooms
It is important, particularly for those who are in the process of adjusting their lifestyles to take their new physical condition into account, that users are welcomed into a facility. Operators should ensure that receptionists can answer queries regarding the type of changing rooms offered e.g. are private cubicles available?

Dry sporting activities
It is for the individual to decide which sports are suitable or not suitable for them. Some ostomates choose not to be involved in heavy contact sports such as martial arts, but ultimately, the choice is theirs and it is the duty of the operator to respect this.

Swimming
Many ostomates use a special, smaller bag for sports such as swimming, and will undertake exercise only after a major bowel movement. Some ostomates choose to arrive at the pool already changed, perhaps wearing a tracksuit, to minimise the time their application is visible. Some choose to wear swimwear specifically designed to securely cover external bags, or may simply keep a T-shirt on whilst swimming. All these points are, however, simply a matter or personal choice, and none in any way should be regarded as a pre-condition of usage.

It is highly unlikely that a colostomy bag seal would fail. However, should a user inform staff that this has happened, operators should follow their normal operating procedures for faecal release. Thus, *there are no special requirements or conditions* for this type of user to follow whilst swimming.

Conclusion
People who have undergone a colostomy or ileostomy should be treated as a normal facility user. Operators simply need to make their staff aware that ostomates need to be treated appropriately and sensitively. Access to sport and recreation for ostomates is a matter of education, sensitivity and awareness, not special conditions or rules.

General information on colostomies:
British Colostomy Association
Tel: 0118 939 1537
Fax: 0118 956 9095
www.bcass.org.uk

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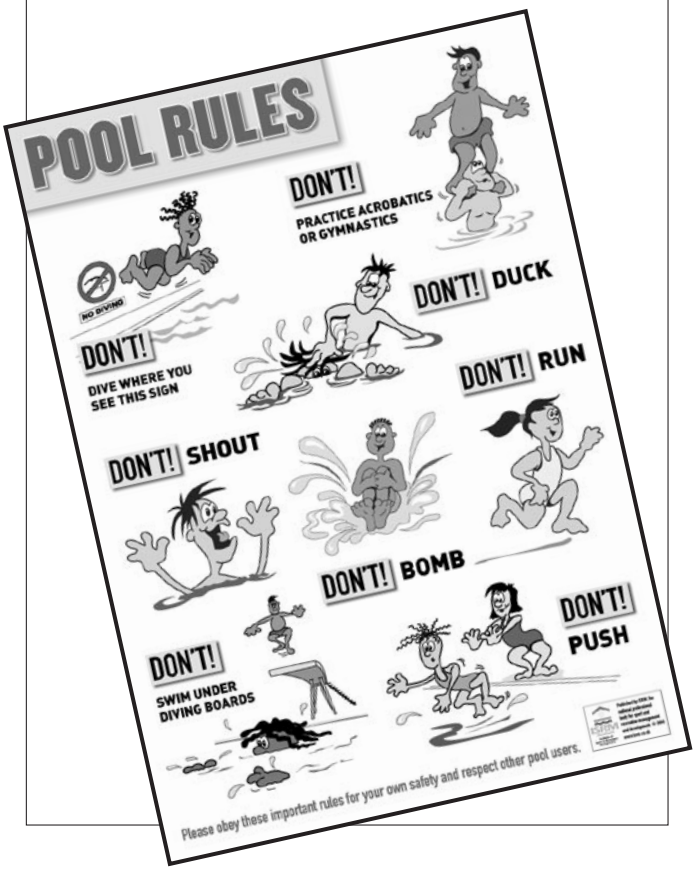
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