

## Be happy—I am

**Yvonne Haines** tells how getting a permanent colostomy and learning to irrigate has transformed her life for the better

**T**he past 15 or so years have been interesting. In January 2005, I was diagnosed with bowel cancer and subsequently told I had secondary cancer in my liver. I was quickly operated on and had a lower anterior resection, followed by chemotherapy and then a second operation to remove the affected part of my liver.

### Hard times

By 2006, I was on the road to recovery and very happy to be cancer-free and alive; however, I was left with a minor problem of bowel incontinence. For 13 years, I had to take up to eight loperamide sachets a day to help with the incontinence. It didn't always prevent unexpected bowel accidents, and it also caused haemorrhoids and severe stomach bloating.

In 2017, my husband died of a brain tumour, and my life changed again. At this point, I lost all confidence in going out alone. The questions crowded in: what if I had an accident? What if I couldn't find a toilet? Who would help me?

### 'Who would help me?' **New options**

I lived like that for around 4 months, until I decided to refer myself back to a bowel consultant. At my initial appointment, he explained that, as I had had most of my rectum removed, things would never get any better for me, so we discussed having a permanent colostomy. I was happy to proceed, as I thought it would give me freedom, and, as I lived alone, it wouldn't matter what I looked like.

The consultant then went on to explain about irrigation and how, if I was able

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Since learning to irrigate her colostomy, Yvonne has been able to enjoy dancing again

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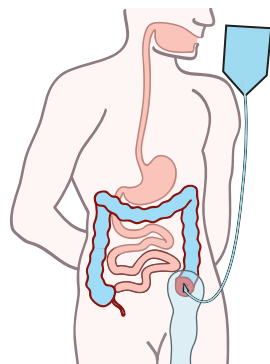
## Irrigating your colostomy

For people with a colostomy, the main daily challenge can be how to manage its output. Typically, it is left to naturally collect throughout the day in a bag, which is then disposed of once full. The rate and consistency of this output can be managed with changes to diet and medicines. Colostomates who want to have complete continence and control without wearing a bag can instead use irrigation.

Irrigation allows colostomates to empty their colon by washing it out with water. This involves infusing body-temperature tap water into the colon via the colostomy. There it stimulates bowel contractions, pushing the contents out through the stoma and into an irrigation sleeve, which empties directly into the toilet. After irrigation, a stoma will typically go a whole 24 hours before it needs to function again.

**More information:** [www.stomatips.com/features/article/ostomy-essentials-colostomy-irrigation](http://www.stomatips.com/features/article/ostomy-essentials-colostomy-irrigation)

**Irrigation kit manufacturers:** • Aquaflush (Acquaflush Actif) • B Braun (IryPump)  
• Coloplast (Assura) • Dansac (Dansac Irrigation Kit) • Hollister (Cone Irrigator Kit)



to manage it, I would not have to wear a colostomy bag, just a small patch, like a surgical dressing. To say I was excited about this information would be an understatement. The thought of being free to come and go without the worry of a bowel accident would give me my old life back. I would be able to go out and see friends, go swimming and even take up dancing again.

**'I'm in control'**

### Looking up

I had the surgery, and all went well; within 3 months, I met up with the stoma team to be taught to irrigate. I was shown once and got the hang of it straight away. Within two weeks, I was irrigating once every 48 hours, sometimes with the occasional breakthrough, but nothing to worry about.

I now have a fantastic life. I enjoy long walks and I regularly go out dancing, often into the small hours. I take my grandchildren out; they think it's great that Nanny no longer has a funny tummy (incontinence). I'm in control, and it feels great. Unfortunately, I now have a hernia that is causing a few issues, but I am having that rectified in the near future.

### Icing on the cake

I consider myself to be very lucky. I had cancer and survived. I live a very fulfilled life with a permanent stoma. Learning to irrigate has been the icing on the cake. I feel clean, free, feminine and very sexy. I have also met a new partner, who I hope to share my life with (hopefully—it's still early days!).

If anyone out there is worried about a permanent colostomy, take it from me: your life can be just as fulfilling living with one. Be happy—I am. **ST**

**Yvonne Haines** has a permanent colostomy and lives in the UK



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