find that pills pass through their stomas looking very much like they did when they went in – because they haven't had a chance to be absorbed.

For ileostomates, medication is generally best taken in liquid form, by injection, or by nasal sprays. Some, but not all, ileostomates find that gel capsules, quick dissolving or uncoated tablets work for them. But avoid pills that are coated (called an enteric coating) to make it easier on the stomach, or those designed for slow release (extended or sustained release products).

If it's an uncoated pill or tablet, you could crush it and mix it in with a spoonful of jam or water. But don't try this with time release tablets or gel caps without checking with your doctor or pharmacist first.

Getting organized

Ostomies come with a lot of baggage that can clutter up your home and your mind. Try to get a handle on all that clutter before it engulfs you.

Within a few weeks of surgery, you'll be awash in ostomy supplies and paraphernalia. The place where you change your appliance can start to look like a M.A.S.H. unit. That's not good for you psychologically, and not very pleasant for family members or visitors either. You'll all feel more positive if you can get it back to looking more homey, and less like a hospital.

Donate unused supplies to one of the many organizations that distribute ostomy products to people in need, locally or in developing countries. You'll feel good to be helping others, while enjoying all that freed-up space.

Try to have all your supplies within easy reach when needed, but out of sight the rest of the time.

Everyone's needs and available space are different but to use my own situation as an example, here's what worked best in my tiny bathroom:

- A plastic container set of 3 drawers on wheels, tucked away behind the door, within reach of the toilet. Inexpensive but very effective.
    - In the top two drawers, I keep my stash of supplies – baseplates, pouches, bag liners, resealable plastic bags, and odor control bags.
    - The bottom drawer is for leftovers – sample products I may try sometime, and products I don't need every day but want to have ready in case of skin irritations, etc. I also keep my well-bagged used baseplates, pouches, and a box of bag liners in there, awaiting disposal. "Leftovers" in the true sense of the word! When I remember, I toss in a scented dryer sheet, just to be extra sure things stay fresh.
- On top of the toilet tank is a mirror (positioned so I can see what I'm doing when facing the toilet), and a small acrylic chest of 3 more drawers. I don't know what it was meant for. Maybe jewelry or makeup? It's attractive, and the perfect size for small ostomy products – like packets of adhesive remover, barrier rings, ostomy scissors, and about a week's worth of bag liners.
- The result is that I can stand in front of the toilet, see what I'm doing, and reach everything I need without taking a step. But when I'm not changing my appliance, everything's tucked away behind closed drawers and no-one would ever guess my bathroom is "ostomy central."

Taking care of an ostomy is very hands-on. But a little paperwork can be helpful too – like a food journal, where you keep track of new foods you try and note if they had any effect.

It's also handy to have a notebook to record medical information. This can be as simple as the names and contact information of your doctors, stoma nurse, and whoever you order supplies from, the product numbers of your ostomy supplies, a list of your current medications, the date(s) of your operation(s), and the type of surgery you had, including what part of your intestines were affected. Bring this with you to medical appointments or ER visits so you can answer questions without looking like a deer in the headlights. You'd be surprised how easy it is to forget details, particularly if you're under stress.

Bottom line: Show your ostomy who's boss. As much as you can, take control of your environment and the management of your ostomy. This will leave you time to get back to more important things, like enjoying the rest of your life.

Finding support

New ostomates can feel they're alone in the world. Most of us never knew anyone who had one. In addition to feeling lonely, you may also experience emotions like anger or depression, and be overwhelmed with questions about living with this strange new object on your stomach.

The best solution to all these concerns is to talk to others. Of course, you should turn to doctors and nurses for medical advice. But people who are actually living with ostomies are a great source of information and support in a whole range of other areas. So how do you find them? Here are two good ways:

Online groups

There are many online groups to choose from. Some specialize in things like ostomies in children, or in people with other complex medical issues. Others are simply for anyone with an ostomy, and their caregivers. They're easy to find by searching terms like "ostomy support group online." Typically, all you need to do is sign up with an email address.

Many of these groups are private. That means only other members can post messages and respond to others. Some are semi-private. Anyone can read the posts but you have to be a member to post a message or respond.