

# How do I disclose that I have an ostomy?

You may tell people more information or less information about your ostomy depending on how close you are to them, how often they will be around you, and how your ostomy might affect them. For instance, your neighbor will probably need to know less about your ostomy than your spouse. This is the same for employers. Some employers may not need to know at all, whereas others may need to know about your ostomy if there are physical requirements in your job.

## **SITUATION #1: LOW DIFFICULTY**

Imagine that you are going back to school after your ostomy surgery. You tell your teacher about your ostomy, but do not want to share much more information.

### **Suggestion:**

"It's a surgery to help me go to the restroom."

Or if you want to share more information:

"I used to have a lot of stomach problems and got an ostomy to help"

## **SITUATION #2: MEDIUM DIFFICULTY**

Imagine you are coming back to work after taking some time off after your surgery. Your job requires you to lift heavy objects sometimes and sit through long meetings. You want to tell your boss and coworkers that you might not be able to lift heavy things or sit in meetings without going to the restroom.

### **Suggestion:**

"I recently had abdominal surgery, so I cannot lift heavy things yet."

Or more specifically:

"I just had surgery to get an ostomy, so I may be in and out of the restroom. If you have any questions, let me know."

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## SITUATION #3: HIGH DIFFICULTY

### EXAMPLE 1:

Sometimes people may not react kindly when you tell them about your ostomy. Imagine that you decided to tell a friend that you have an ostomy. After telling them about your surgery, the friend says, “Eww, aren’t those gross?”

### Suggestion:

"That has not been my experience. I can see where this could be scary or different. I feel so much better since I got my ostomy and it has finally made me healthy again."

### EXAMPLE 2:

Imagine that someone says something hurtful to you about your ostomy. You do not know this person very well, so you do not want to talk to them anymore. How do you get out of the conversation?

### Suggestion:

"I don't feel comfortable discussing this with you. I'd like to talk about something else."

Or:

"I don't feel like talking about this right now. I'm going to go ahead and head out."

One experienced a similar interaction, and they responded, **“I wouldn’t be alive without my ostomy. So I make that crystal clear** to anybody who kind of hesitates or wants to say something about how nasty or dirty they are.”