

Fistula Management

Definition of a Fistula

An abnormal opening between two hollow organs or between a hollow organ and the skin. Predisposing factors for fistula formation include impaired ability to heal after surgery, Crohn's disease, breakdown of intestinal anastomosis, or infection.

Examples of Fistulas

- Enterocutaneous fistula – An opening between the small intestine and the skin. Drainage will likely be liquid, may be high volume, and will contain digestive enzymes that are damaging to the skin
- Colocutaneous fistula – An opening between the colon and the skin. Output can be liquid to semi-formed in consistency, are usually malodorous, and may contain gas
- Vesicocutaneous fistula – An opening between the bladder and the skin which drains urine
- Spit fistula or esophagostomy – An opening between the esophagus and the skin that drains mucus and any fluids that may be given orally



Fistula in an open abdominal wound



Enterocutaneous fistula

Challenges Associated with Fistula Management

- Although there are predisposing factors, often a fistula is an unplanned occurrence related to surgery or disease and therefore, challenging for patients, families, and caregivers
- Often located in difficult areas for management (i.e., near or in incision lines, creases, tubes, or other fistulas)
- Often the fistula opening is at or below skin level
- Drainage is often corrosive to skin, malodorous, and may be of high volume.

Key Goals for Nursing Management

- Protect the skin – The output from a fistula can be very irritating to the skin. Broken skin contributes to pain and discomfort. A skin barrier can protect the skin from contact with the drainage
- Contain the output – If the output is minimal, gauze dressings may be sufficient for containment. However, if the volume of the output from the fistula is significant or frequently overwhelms the dressing, a pouch may be more appropriate. Using a pouch can be more efficient and can help reduce healthcare professionals from exposure to bodily fluids
- Measure the output – With a high output fistula, loss of fluids and electrolytes can be a major concern. Measurement may be easier with a pouching system than with absorbent dressings. Consider a bedside drainage collector to help keep drainage away from the skin barrier
- Manage costs – Care of fistulas can be costly in terms of supplies and human resources. Using a pouching system and appropriate accessories can be more cost-effective and manageable than frequent dressing changes
- Control odor – Containment of the drainage in a pouching system, even in small quantities, can help with odor management. Other accessory products also can assist with odor control when the pouch is changed or emptied
- Provide patient comfort – Effectively managing a fistula can contribute to patient dignity and comfort

Fistula Management

| PATIENT GOALS | | PROTECT SKIN | CONTAIN OUTPUT | MEASURE OUTPUT | MANAGE COSTS | CONTROL ODOR | PATIENT COMFORT |
|---|--|--------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Product Options | Comments | | | | | | |
| Premier High Output Pouches Stock No 80070 or 80110 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extended wear cut-to-fit skin barrier Can be connected to bedside collector | • | • | • | • | • | • |
| Wound Drainage Collectors Stock No 9773, 9776, or 9778 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standard wear cut-to-fit skin barrier Can be connected to bedside collector | • | • | • | • | • | • |
| Hollister Universal Catheter Access Port Stock No 9779 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Optional Accommodates tubes needing to exit a pouch | | | • | • | | |
| Pouchkins Pediatric Pouches Stock No 3796, 3795, 3797 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ideal for small, hard to pouch locations or where volume of output is low | • | • | • | • | • | • |
| Adapt Barrier Rings Stock No 7805, 7815, 7806, 8805, 8815 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use to caulk uneven skin contours Use to help prevent drainage from getting under skin barrier of pouch | • | | | • | | • |
| Adapt Paste Stock No 79300, 79301 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use to caulk uneven skin contours Use to help prevent drainage from getting under skin barrier of pouch | • | | | | | |
| m9 Odor Eliminator Spray Stock No 7732, 7733, 7734, 7735 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Room deodorizer | | | | | • | • |
| Adapt Odor Eliminator and Lubricant Stock No 78500, 78501 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eliminates odor when drainable pouch is emptied Makes emptying drainable pouch easy | | | | | • | • |
| Adapt Medical Adhesive Spray Stock No 7730 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps improve pouch seal in difficult locations Spray on adhesive side of pouching system | | | | • | | • |
| Adapt Stoma Powder Stock No 7906 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps to dry moist irritated skin for a secure pouch seal | | | | • | | • |
| Bedside Drainage Collector Stock No 9839 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ideal for high volume, liquid discharge Provides a large container for collection of fluid | | | • | | | • |

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Routine follow-up with your healthcare professional is recommended.

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Prior to using any ostomy products/accessories be sure to read all product inserts and labels.

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