

# Body Image Perception and Peristomal Skin Condition as Quality of Life Issues

Thomas Nichols, MS, MBA, Michael Riemer, MS  
Hollister Incorporated, Libertyville, Illinois, USA

## Introduction

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Ostomy surgery is a traumatic surgery resulting in altered body appearance. Non-normal (non-intact) peristomal skin condition is reported to affect up to two-thirds of certain ostomy populations<sup>1</sup> and may amplify any negative perception of body image due to the stoma surgery. However, quality of life studies indicate that not all ostomates react similarly to ostomy surgery and altered body image.

## Aims and Methods

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This study investigated body image perception and peristomal skin condition as a quality of life issue in three distinct groups of ostomates within 24 months post-surgery. Body mass index, which may be a potential confounding factor, is included in the analysis. The study was based on 663 adult ostomates from North America and the UK who responded to the Ostomy

Comprehensive Health and Life Assessment<sup>2</sup> (a validated and reliable quality of life instrument, Cronbach's alpha = 0.83). A subset of ostomates ( $n = 389$ ) were identified as:

- Group 1: Having a positive life satisfaction index and stating the stoma has had a positive effect on their life
- Group 2: Having a positive life satisfaction index but stating the stoma has had a negative effect on their life
- Group 3: Having a negative life satisfaction index and stating the stoma has a negative effect on their life

## Results

The perception of body image differed greatly between groups and within groups. It was associated with the ostomates' perception of the effect the stoma had on their lives, life satisfaction, and the presence or absence of non-normal peristomal skin. This was particularly true in the subgroup of ostomates with a negative life satisfaction index who stated the stoma had a negative effect on their lives. Body mass index was also shown to affect the perception of body image in those classified as underweight ( $bmi \leq 18.5$ ,  $p = 0.0279$ ) and was accounted for.

The respondents were first asked to self-report their peristomal skin condition. This is shown below.

The very last time you changed your pouch/barrier and looked at the skin around your stoma would you say it was ...			
normal healthy appearing skin ?	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
	51.3%	57.7%	25.8%

The cross-tabulated response is shown below:

Group 1: N=157	I think my stoma has ...			
		Changed my appearance	Disfigured me	Had no effect on the way I look
When I stand in front of a mirror	I like the way I look	5.1%	---	4.5%
	I do not like the way I look	21.2%	8.3%	5.1%
	What I see, I am OK with	21.2%	1.3%	33.3%

Those demonstrating a negative life satisfaction index, and stating the stoma has a negative effect on their life (Group 3), were least likely to report normal healthy appearing skin. The respondents were also asked to respond to the following two questions:

- When I stand in front of a mirror
  - I like the way I look
  - I do not like the way I look
  - What I see I am OK with
- I think my stoma has
  - Changed my appearance
  - Disfigured me
  - No effect on the way I look

<b>Group 2:</b> N=165	<i>I think my stoma has ...</i>			
		<b>Changed my appearance</b>	<b>Disfigured me</b>	<b>Had no effect on the way I look</b>
<b>When I stand in front of a mirror</b>	I like the way I look	1.2%	---	4.8%
	I do not like the way I look	20.5%	9.7%	4.2%
	What I see, I am OK with	17.0%	1.2%	41.2%

<b>Group 3:</b> N=67	<i>I think my stoma has ...</i>			
		<b>Changed my appearance</b>	<b>Disfigured me</b>	<b>Had no effect on the way I look</b>
<b>When I stand in front of a mirror</b>	I like the way I look	---	---	---
	I do not like the way I look	30.3%	60.6%	1.5%
	What I see, I am OK with	3.0%	3.0%	1.5%

The groups demonstrated a disparity between body image perception. Group 3; the group indicating a negative life satisfaction index, and stating the stoma has a negative effect on their life, and had the least reported normal healthy peristomal skin was the group with the largest reported negative body image perception (disfigured me x I do not like the way I look = 60.6%). When the category 'changed my appearance' was entered into this, approximately 91% of Group 3 respondents were accounted for.

## Discussion

The data presented an overview of three disparate groups within the context of life satisfaction. The groups differ on where they were placed within a life satisfaction index and the perception of the effect the stoma has on their lives. Between the groups, the data demonstrated differences in

the quality of peristomal skin and the perception of body image. What is not known and cannot be determined from the data is whether there is a causal link in any of this, or if these are simply associated factors.

## Conclusions

There is an association between the quality of life issues investigated in this study, peristomal skin condition, and the perception of body image. Healthcare providers should consider this and be aware that undesirable characteristics may be more prone to exist in one group than the other. It is suggested that further investigation within the realm of an experimental study be conducted to verify the observations presented here.

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**References:**

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- 1 Lyon C, Smith A: Abdominal Stomas and their Skin Disorders.  
UK: Martin Dunitz. Ltd, 2001.
- 2 Hollister Ostomy Comprehensive Health and Life Assessment,  
Hollister Incorporated, Libertyville, Illinois, USA

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