UOAA United Ostomy Associations of America, Inc.
AFFILIATED SUPPORT GROUP
Affiliate Group #004

Clearwater Ostomy Support Group

www.clearwaterostomy.org
clearwaterostomy@gmail.com
SUPPORT LINE 727-490-9931

FEBRUARY 2026

Next Meeting

Saturday, March 21, 2026

Support Meeting 10:30 am

Largo Public Library
120 Central Park Drive
Largo FL 33771

UPCOMING EVENTS

2026 MEETING SCHEDULE

Subject to change!

April 11, 2026

May 16, 2026

Future dates and locations are still to be determined and confirmed.

the President's Message

Hi Everyone,

We welcome spring and all the newness it provides. The trees and flowers bloom and our world transforms as we brace ourselves for the onslaught of the heat that our long summers bring.

St. Patrick's Day is upon us. St. Patrick's Day is filled with superstitions meant to attract luck and ward off mischief, with the most common being wearing green to avoid being pinched by invisible leprechauns.

In April, we will be meeting a week before our normal date. We will be meeting on April 11th, 2026.

Be sure to save the date and we hope the luck of the Irish are with you all!

Blessings,

Marilyn

Our meetings are open to new ostomates, the experienced ostomates, the caregivers, the families, the healthcare workers, the support persons, the nursing students, the social workers and anyone who has a connection with ostomies and would like to join us. We welcome you all!

Also...

Tips & Hints that Still Apply

Do not worry about “accidents” and “problems” that may never happen. Plan ahead; keep an extra appliance change and extra clothes handy in case something does happen, but don’t worry needlessly. Life is too precious.

Remember after surgery when you were advised to “chew, chew, chew and drink, drink, drink?” It still applies; chew food carefully and never go by a water fountain without taking a drink.

Keep an updated list of all the ostomy supplies you use for your ostomy nurse, doctor, and family members; include the product numbers, sizes and manufacturers, as well. Keep it in a place where you can find it quickly. Make sure a family member knows where the list is.

Do not keep a “lifetime” supply of ostomy supplies on hand. Shelf life of those items may be limited.

Build a support system of people to answer questions when you have problems. Try to find a local support group where you can look for an ostomy nurse, ostomy visitor and the officers.

Tea is an antispasmodic, is soothing to an upset stomach and contains potassium to replace one of the electrolytes frequently lost by ostomates.

Tomato juice is lower in cost per cup than Gatorade, while providing as much sodium and 5 times more potassium. Orange juice is another alternative, providing the same amount of sodium and 15 times the amount of potassium.

Don’t shove parsley aside; it is one of nature’s best deodorants.

Antihistamines in allergy medications can slow down bowel motility (spontaneous movement of the digestive track). If you become constipated while on antihistamines, your physician might suggest an alternate medication.

Some foods can change the color of your stool. Bananas may turn it black; beets and tomatoes may turn it red; dyes in many foods (like in Jell-O, licorice, etc. may turn it red, black or green.

Lengthy sitting in one place can force the pouch contents upward around the stoma and cause leakage. Getting up occasionally and moving around will help.

In an airplane or car, place the seat belt above or below the stoma. Don’t leave the belt unbuckled or excessively loose (1” maximum slack is recommended). Shields are available to protect the stoma.

When emptying your pouch, if using a clip, slip it under your watchband, into the side of your shoe or top of your sock or hose so that it doesn’t fall into the toilet or elsewhere. Carry an extra clip with you.

Find Your Way: The Journey Forward with an Ostomy

Presence and Appreciation

When you have experienced uncertainty through the lens that we have, you gain appreciation for ordinary moments. Not because you're trying to be grateful – because you actually are. People talk about mindfulness like it's something you have to work toward. For us, it's just anther day. We live it by necessity, not by choice. No expensive spiritual retreat with gurus required. This kind of presence can get exhausting at times, even bordering on hypervigilance. But kept under control, that presence is valuable body literacy – lessons we can transfer to all aspects of our lives. For me: it has made me feel more alive. When asked what it's like living with an ostomy for forty years, part of what I say is it taught me how to be present in my life instead of just racing quickly through it.

Three stages of the Ostomy Journey Over Time

I've noticed the journey with an ostomy isn't one continuous road. It shifts, and it has stages. Understanding where you are in these stages can help make sense of current challenges and hint at what might be next in life. I think of it as three stages:

1. **Getting medically stable**
2. **2. Becoming functionally independent**
3. **3. Learning to flourish and thrive**

First things first. You can't do much until you're medically stable. This is about listening carefully to your doctors, managing complications, or recovering from a procedure. When leaving the hospital after one of my surgeries, when asked how I was feeling, I would joke: "I'm upright, I've got pants on, and I'm taking nourishment by mouth." That was my humorous way of saying I was medically stable. On my way home. Medical stability is the foundation everything else builds on. Without it, you're just trying to survive. With it, you can start thinking about comes next.

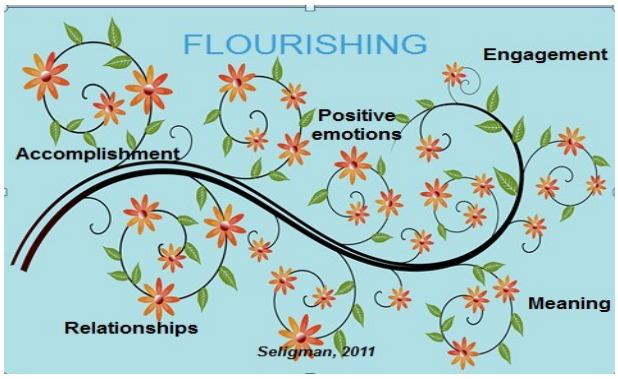
Wanting to flourish is being human

It's honoring the life you were given by actually living it fully. Becoming functional is about being proficient in looking after your stoma and appliance. It's creating a new daily routine that includes all your other hygiene and 'get ready' rituals. Getting comfortable in this whole new world. When you are functional, you become grateful. Functional is a big deal! You can leave the house without mapping every bathroom. You can eat dinner with friends. You can sleep through the night with minimal interruptions. But here's what happens sometimes. You get functional, and it feels so secure that you lock yourself in. You find your safe foods, your reliable routines, your predictable schedule. Too predictable? The problem is when function becomes your ceiling instead of your floor.

Flourish and Thrive

Let's talk about moving from functional stage

(stage 2) to flourishing (stage 3). Flourishing is what you want out of your life - not in spite of your ostomy but in fact because of your ostomy and the life-saving consequences that got you this far. Flourishing is when you stop asking "Can I do this with my ostomy?" and start asking "Do I want to do this?" It's when your ostomy becomes just one part of your life, not the organizing principle of your existence. It's when you stop planning around your ostomy - and start planning around what you want out of life.



Sounds easier than it is to do! When we get functional, there is loud applause from friends, family and doctors. We too are excited. Except we are people. And just being stable, then functional, is not enough. We want to thrive and flourish and become the person we imagine ourselves being. That's where the gap shows up - the space between functional and flourishing. There is a gap between being functional and flourishing. We can be so pleased with being functional that we decide to stay in that mode - never pushing forward, never trying new things, never creating new adventures that self-doubt warns against. Sometimes we get lost in that gap. You're no longer a patient, but you're not quite thriving either. It's easy to get disoriented, questioning if wanting more is worth the risk. If we want more, are we ungrateful for what we have? Deep question. I say no.

Thriving is the aspiration

However it looks for each of us, that's the direction forward. Being grateful for your medical stability and functional independence doesn't mean you have to stop there. You can be thankful for what you've achieved AND still want to grow, explore, and push your boundaries. Wanting to flourish is being human. It's honoring the life you were given by actually living it fully. The ostomy journey is not a straight line. Circumstances will sometimes force you backward. What matters is finding your way back - regaining functionality and taking that leap of faith toward flouring again.

Inspiration Without Comparison - Final Reflections

When you see someone else thriving - really thriving - it expands your sense of what's possible for yourself. But careful about comparing. We are all on a unique journey, each of us at different stages - not just in our ostomy journey but in our life journey. The 19th century playwright Oscar Wilde said: "Be yourself, everyone else is already taken." Each of us knows our own life better than anyone else. We've already been carrying our courage forward every day - showing up here only made it more visible. That same courage is what lets us reach for more. Thriving is the aspiration. However it looks for each of us, that's the direction forward. And whatever tomorrow brings, we already carry what it takes to keep moving toward it.

flourishing

/ˈflərəSHiNG/

1. The opposite of languishing.
2. A sense of fulfillment, purpose and happiness.
3. The peak of well-being: You have a strong sense of meaning, mastery and mattering to others.

Writing—A Pathway to Healing

By Amy Taylor

Facing a major illness or undergoing surgery can be an overwhelming experience, not only physically but also emotionally and mentally. During medical treatments and recovery, many find solace and strength in writing, whether through drafting a memoir or jotting down notes in a personal journal. Both forms of writing offer distinct benefits that can aid in healing, providing a powerful tool for navigating the challenges of illness.

One of the most profound impacts of writing, particularly during or after a health crisis, is the emotional release it provides. Reflecting on, and then writing about the events creating a narrative that gives meaning to what they have gone through. When dealing with illness, emotions like fear, anxiety, and uncertainty often feel all-encompassing. Writing offers a safe space to process these feelings, reducing stress and anxiety. By putting thoughts on paper, individuals can gain perspective, distance themselves from overwhelming emotions, and make sense of their journey. Writing can also help a person feel more in control of their health journey. Illness or surgery can leave a person feeling powerless, as so much is dictated by medical professionals and the physical body. When someone recounts their experience, they become the storyteller, reframing the events in a way that empowers them. They can choose which details to highlight, what lessons to emphasize, and how their personal growth is shaped through the narrative. This active role in their own story can renew a sense of agency. Writing also provides an opportunity for introspection. Whether it's journalling daily thoughts or crafting a memoir, the act of writing forces individuals to slow down and reflect on their inner world. This process can uncover new insights about one's strength, resilience, and capacity to overcome adversity. For those recovering from surgery or managing a chronic illness, these revelations can be life-changing, fostering a deeper understanding of self and the ways they can adapt to and rise above physical limitations.

For those who plan on writing a memoir, their writing offers the chance to leave a lasting legacy. Sharing the story of an illness or recovery can be a way to inspire others going through similar challenges. In crafting a memoir, individuals create a permanent record of their journey that can comfort loved ones or provide insight to others facing similar struggles. Even if shared only with close friends or family, a memoir can create a connection that fosters healing on both sides.

For those not inclined toward a full memoir, daily journaling is an accessible and effective alternative. Unlike memoir writing, which tends to focus on the big picture and life lessons, journaling is often more immediate and raw. It allows people to vent frustrations, document small wins in recovery, and track their emotional fluctuations over time. Studies have shown that expressive writing, such as journaling, can lower blood pressure, boost immune function, and reduce the symptoms of depression.

Whether through structured memoir writing or free form journaling, the act of writing can be a powerful tool for healing after a major illness or surgery. It allows individuals to process their emotions, regain a sense of control, and uncover valuable insights about themselves. For many, these benefits extend beyond physical recovery, leading to a deeper emotional and psychological healing as well.

In times of medical crisis, pen and paper (or a keyboard) can become invaluable allies on the road to recovery.

The Vicious Cycle

By Mary Lou Boyer, RN, ET, CWSOCN

Along with an appropriate pouching system, the skin around the stoma is most important for a secure ostomy appliance seal. The condition of the skin can affect not only how your pouch adheres to the skin, but also comfort level, emotional health and general well-being. Healthy, smooth skin provides the ideal surface for a pouch, while irritated weeping skin is painful and frustrating. However, even with all attempts to keep the peristomal skin in good condition, one of the most common problems for a person with an ostomy is peristomal skin irritation. Skin irritation can start out as a seemingly small problem, but can quickly develop into a difficult and painful situation. As it worsens, it is harder to obtain a secure appliance seal. That in turn increases chances for further leakage and increased damage to the skin. It turns into a vicious cycle: Irritated skin that becomes raw and weepy leads to poor adhesion of the skin barrier, allowing further opportunity for leakage of stool or urine onto the skin to cause even more skin damage. If the vicious cycle is allowed to continue, it can develop into an almost uncontrollable situation. Therefore it is important to avoid it, and how to care for problems that occur.

There are a number of factors that can cause skin irritation.

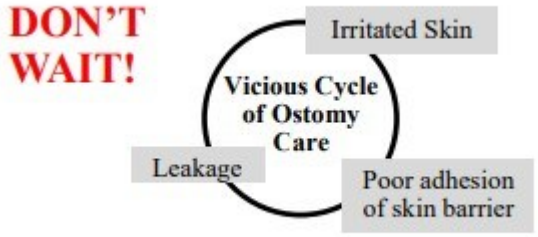
These are the most common:

1. Stool from a colostomy or ileostomy has enzymes that can “digest” and break down the skin as they do foods. Contact with the skin causes mild itching and burning at first, however it can quickly erode the skin until it is so open and raw that an ostomy pouch is difficult to adhere. The damage may be severe enough to cause bleeding and it is very painful.
2. Urine from a urostomy can damage skin as moisture soaks in, causing swelling of the skin cells and allowing bacteria to enter. Urine can deposit urine crystals that feel like fine salt, acting like sandpaper, scraping the skin surface. With prolonged exposure, urine causes wart-like thickening of the skin close to the stoma.
3. An allergic reaction to any ostomy care product in contact with the peristomal skin can cause itching, redness, and weeping of the skin. There may even be blistering.
4. The peristomal skin can be injured when the pouch barrier is removed too often or too roughly. This is called “mechanical trauma”. Pulling adhesive off of the skin strips the outer layer of skin cells faster than your body can replace them, causing red, painful damaged skin that may weep fluid.
5. Rough removal can tear out hair on the peristomal skin. Pulling out hair causes folliculitis, infection of the hair follicles, and is characterized by red, sore, itching and eventually weeping skin. It can also look like pus-filled or an open pimple.
6. Fungal infections or yeast infections usually look like tiny red pimples with small white tops. They can be scattered or so close together that the area is red. Severe fungal infections become very weepy. The most telling sign that the redness or tiny bumps are fungal is the constant itchiness.

Breaking the Vicious Cycle

Breaking the vicious cycle starts with figuring out what caused the problem in the very beginning. To determine the cause, it is necessary to inspect the skin and pouch barrier that is removed with each appliance change. It could be called “ostomy detective work”.

Look at where the irritation is on the skin. Then look at the back of the pouch barrier. Compare them to see if the area of irritated skin is “mirrored” on the back of the wafer. In other words, does the wafer show signs of wearing away or have a stain from leakage across the same area where it previously adhered to the skin? Is the skin problem close to the stoma or further away from the stoma? If the irritation is close to the stoma, is it all the way around the stoma, or to one side, or below the stoma? Any of these can indicate stool or urine contact on the skin. The wafer opening size may need to be adjusted. It may be necessary to use a different pouching system, add a barrier ring or paste strip, or use a pouching system with convexity.



Next check to see if the affected area looks like shape of any product used on the skin, such as the circular or square skin barrier, where paste or a barrier ring was applied, or where the tape portion of the pouching system comes in contact with the skin. If redness, itchiness and weepiness match the size and shape of any product, the cause may be an allergic reaction. If you have a history of allergies prior to ostomy surgery, you may be more likely to have allergies to ostomy care products to prevent skin contact with problematic items. Some allergy medications can help. Check with your doctor as to whether you can take over the counter allergy medications.

Medical trauma related to removing the appliance too quickly can be prevented with careful pouch removal and the use of adhesive remover. Press the skin away from the barrier rather than pulling the wafer off of the skin. Adhesive removers help loosen the bond between the skin and pouch barrier without pulling the skin. Wash adhesive removers from the skin before applying the new pouch.

Avoid pulling of hair around the stoma to prevent or treat folliculitis. Keeping the area free of hair is the first step. It is best to use an electric shaver or trimmer as disposable or blade-type razors tend to cut or scrape the skin and pull on body hair. Use adhesive remover to help release pouch adhesives. Wash the skin with mild antibacterial soap and rinse thoroughly. Mild cases will clear up with careful technique. It may be necessary to use an antibacterial powder (such as Gold Bond, Columbia, or Amens) on affected areas. When using powder, gently massage the powder into the skin, dust of excess, and pat or spray no-sting liquid skin barrier to seal the powder.

Fungal infections commonly occur under the pouch barrier seal where it provides a warm, dark and moist environment in which they thrive. If you have been on antibiotic therapy, it is more likely that you will be susceptible to fungal infections under the appliance. It can easily spread further than the pouch seal and can become weepy and sore in addition to the pronounced itchiness. As it progresses, it may appear as solid red patches or have a white-coated appearance.

It is treated with antifungal powder sealed with no-sting skin barrier film. As always, when using powder, gently massage the powder into the skin, dust off the excess and pat or spray no-sting liquid skin barrier to seal the powder. If the problem is persistent, prescription medication may be needed.

No matter what the reason for skin irritation, it is important to take immediate action. All too often, when the irritation is mild, it may be ignored or let go. It may be an inconvenient time, you may be busy, away from home, or decided to wait to do something about it.

If you are having a leakage and you are not able to clear up the problem on your own, do seek help from someone knowledgeable in ostomy care.

Resuming Social Activities After Surgery

Socializing

Once you are discharged from hospital, you'll need time at home to begin adjusting to the stoma and learn how to care for your body. How long this period lasts will vary greatly from patient to patient depending on how well their surgical wounds have healed and whether or not there are other factors affecting recovery. Work on building up your strength by gentle walking and puttering around the home, and practice your stoma management skills. Build up your stamina a little each day.

Set yourself small targets when resuming socializing. You should be able to handle being out of the house for an hour or two - a trip to the dog park, or to the grocery store are simple excursions that reinforce a feeling of getting back into the swing of things. Such small outings that let you be around people without a major social commitment can help restore a feeling of normalcy.

You'll soon realize that although you feel different, to others you are the same. You can add more ambitious events as your strength and confidence grow. It might be preferable to keep those first social outings low key, as a lot of noise and activity may be tiring in the beginning. On the other hand, maybe the anonymity of a loud crowd focused on something else might be what you need— we're all different!

Don't forget, if you are meeting new people, you don't have to tell them about your condition unless you want to. Just do whatever makes you feel most comfortable.

Dining Out

While you are recovering at home you should begin to eat the foods you enjoyed before but with some precautions if your surgery resulted in an ileostomy. Nuts, raw vegetables, meat gristle, and popcorn are just a few of the foods you must be wary about eating because of the danger of blockages. Ask an ostomy nurse or local support group for a list of foods you need to be careful about. Introduce different things in small amounts at a time and chew well. Those with a colostomy don't need to be as vigilant, but common sense should be your guide. Urostomates can pretty much eat what they ate before. Once you have had a chance to test different types of food and have a better idea of what foods suit you, there's no reason why you shouldn't be able to enjoy a meal out in a restaurant.

Start with a familiar restaurant and keep it simple. You can order what you used to like but be aware that rich foods and sauces may cause some upset - it may have been a long time since you ate such things! Also, pub and restaurant food portions can be larger than what you have been used to so don't stuff yourself. If you don't want to wait around to be served, go earlier when it's likely to be less busy. On the other hand, if you would rather blend in with the crowd, family times are usually busier.

If you're concerned about particular types of food such as ethnic dishes, try them out at home first so you know how you're going to react.

If you normally have a drink at home, it's best to start with a smaller quantity of your choice of drink.

For example, drink a small beer rather than a large one. This will help your body build up your tolerance to alcohol again.

It might be wise to check out the availability of bathrooms in advance - if a restaurant requires a key to use the facilities, or if the facilities are one stall in the back through the kitchen, you might want to eat out elsewhere until you feel confident about managing your ostomy.

And last, don't worry about your stoma making noises. Pubs and restaurants have a lot of background noise. Nobody will hear anything your body does.

Movies, Plays and Concerts

Movies are pretty easy - go early and choose an aisle seat if you're a little anxious the first time. A lot of movies are so loud these days nobody could possibly hear any noise the stoma might make anyway. With an aisle seat if you need to visit the bathroom you won't have to step over others. Plays and concerts that have less convenient assigned seats might be more of a challenge so let your confidence level be your guide. In time you'll get to know your body and what to expect from it in social situations.

Weddings, Birthdays and Celebrations

Don't you dare miss out on special occasions because you have an ostomy!! If you are strong enough to attend, please do so. Be aware that you may tire more easily and should exercise some restraint if there's a lot of food and alcohol being served, but otherwise don't deny yourself the fun and pleasure of joining friends and loved ones on their special days. No one is going to be staring at you, they'll just be glad you came.

When to Use Ostomy Barrier Extenders

What are barrier extenders? Skin barrier extenders are curved adhesive strips that "frame" the skin barrier and help it conform to uneven body folds and contours. They may help increase wear time (i.e., how long you can wear your skin barrier before it fails) by reducing barrier edge lifting and increasing the adhesive coverage area. Ostomy barrier extenders are one of the newest additions to the list of ostomy accessories in the past 5 years.

The question that begs answering is: What is the purpose of these barrier extenders? When I first became an ostomy nurse, I noticed that some ostomy products lacked the surface area for individuals with a larger abdomen, or if they had a large stoma, we were cutting to the maximum, leaving very little of the barrier to adhere to the abdomen.

Individuals have attended the ostomy clinic with tape around their flange to provide them with the security that their ostomy flange would adhere to their abdomen. I have seen it all, from duct tape, to hockey tape, to paper tape. Thus, the birth of the Ostomy Barrier extenders.

The big question I always get asked is, "Do I need these strips?" As mentioned above, there are times when these barrier extenders play a vital role.

However, the bigger question is; Are they needed? No, not everyone needs them. If you find your flange is starting to lift at the edges after a day or two, and there is no leakage, applying the Barrier extenders will help prolong your wear time.

Perhaps your belly button does not allow the flange to adhere very well; placing a strip over that section may help secure your flange. Other times you may want a little security when being active, like swimming, skiing, bike riding, or perhaps during intimacy. On the other hand, some individuals feel that it gives them a sense of security. Similar to an ostomy belt.

A note of caution, these flange extenders are not meant to keep a leak in. They should not be used to trap the urine or stool behind the flange. They cannot prevent a leak; a leak started where your stoma meets your flange opening. Trapping the urine or stool beneath the flange will cause skin breakdown. They can be used to prevent the edges of the flange lifting. These strips have many names, depending on the company that makes them.

REASONS TO COME TO MEETINGS…

"We come to our local chapter meetings to take comfort in the fact that we are not alone; to bolster up our morale; to be educated in options regarding ostomy management and equipment; to receive practical hints on skin and health care, to help ourselves by helping others."

Dehydration Can Drain Your Mind and Mood

Feeling out of sorts, but not sure why? You might be dehydrated. Two new studies found even mild dehydration comes with big consequences: altered mood, impaired memory, trouble concentrating, fatigue, headaches, anxiety. While the reasons for these symptoms are unclear, researchers at the University of Connecticut, Human Performance Laboratory noted that dehydration causes changes in electrolyte balances in the blood as well as serotonin levels and mood.

How to tell if you're dehydrated?

Check the color of your urine. "Anything darker than a pale straw hue means you need to drink more," says study author Lawrence Armstrong, PhD.

Thanks to Holly St. Lifer, AARP Magazine via Ostomy Association of Middlesex County, NJ

- **I don't repeat gossip, so listen closely the first time.**
- **I think my phone is broken. I pressed the home button but I'm still at work.**
- **We all know mirrors don't lie. I'm just grateful that they don't laugh.**

- **The correct term for gluten-free sugarless vegan brownies is "compost."**
- **I need a six-month vacation, twice a year.**
- **Don't regret past mistakes. Whether good or bad decisions, they all led you to where you are today.**
- **Disregard this if you are in prison.**

To the person who stole my glasses. I will find you. I have contacts.

Loads of information can be found at the United Ostomy Association of American website.

UOAA's Main Website -
www.ostomy.org

UOAA Discussion Board -
www.uoaa.org/forum

Facebook: **Facebook.com/UOAA**

Twitter: **Twitter.com/UOAA**

Phoenix Ostomy Magazine:
phoenixuoaa.org

Keep Hydrated!

Keep Hydrated!

Keep Hydrated!

OFFICERS

President
Marilyn Bossard 727-366–0807
g1945moosey@verizon.net

Vice President
VACANT

Treasurer & Membership
JoAnn Barr 727-669-3820
clrwostmy.jabarr@gmail.com

Secretary
Mary Beth Makrianes
ClearwaterOstomy@gmail.com

Newsletter Editor
Mary Beth Makrianes
ClearwaterOstomy@gmail.com

OTHER IMPORTANT NUMBERS

Angels of Hope Ostomy Clinic and Closet
Lila Watkins 727-744-2660
Karen Burdewick 727-667-9678

The Angels of Hope Ostomy Clinic and Closet is located in the mobile unit behind the church:

Clearview United Methodist Church
4515 38th Avenue North
St. Petersburg FL 33713

Follow us on Facebook and Twitter for lots of great information and some humor.

https://www.facebook.com/clearwaterostomysupportgroup/

https://twitter.com/clwtrostomy_grp

Need Emergency Ostomy Help?

The Angels of Hope Ostomy Clinic and Closet is located in the mobile unit at the Clearview United Methodist Church at 4515 38th Ave N, St. Pete FL 33713.

The clinic/closet will only be available by appointment.

You may schedule an appointment for a consult or for supplies, please contact **Lila Watkins at 727-744-2660 or Karen Burdewick at 727-667-9678.**

COSG #004

12931 88th Avenue
Seminole, FL 33776