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, February 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!

March 21, 2026

April 18, 2026

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

the President's Message

Hi Everyone,

Well, it's February and love is in the air! There is a lot that happens this month: Valentine's Day, Mardi Gras (Fat Tuesday), Ash Wednesday, and Spring Training for all you baseball fans!!!

We were thrilled to see you all in January to kick off the new year! Now, we are ready for Spring and all the newness that it brings.

This month our speaker is Glenn Smith who is a practicing IV Therapist. He will be discussing IV Therapy and low gut absorption.

We look forward to seeing you all at this month's meeting!!!

Be sure to save the date!

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!

TIPS & TRICKS

Some of the Best Basic Ostomy Hints

Don't behave as if having an ostomy makes you less of a person or some freak of nature. There are lots of us and most of us are glad to be alive!

Build a support system of people to answer questions when you have a problem.

Don't play the dangerous game of making your appliance last by over taping or putting off a change.

Don't wait until you see the bottom of your supply box before ordering more. Always count on delays in shipping, holidays, etc. when calculating what is needed.

Zip-lock sandwich bags are useful and odor proof for disposal of used ostomy pouches.

Don't get hung up on odors. There are some great sprays and some internal deodorants... Remember: everybody creates some odors in the bathroom. Don't feel you are an exception.

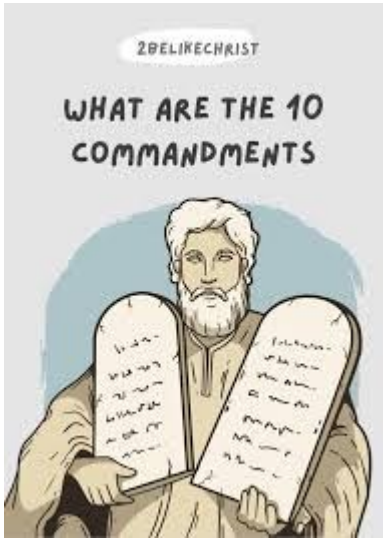
Hydration and electrolyte balance is of vital importance. Be sure to drink enough fluids to maintain good hydration.

In the beginning after surgery, almost everyone experiences some depression. If you fit into this category, you are certainly not alone. Try something as simple as walking... long walks. If the depression seems to linger, don't be afraid or ashamed to seek help. There is help out there!

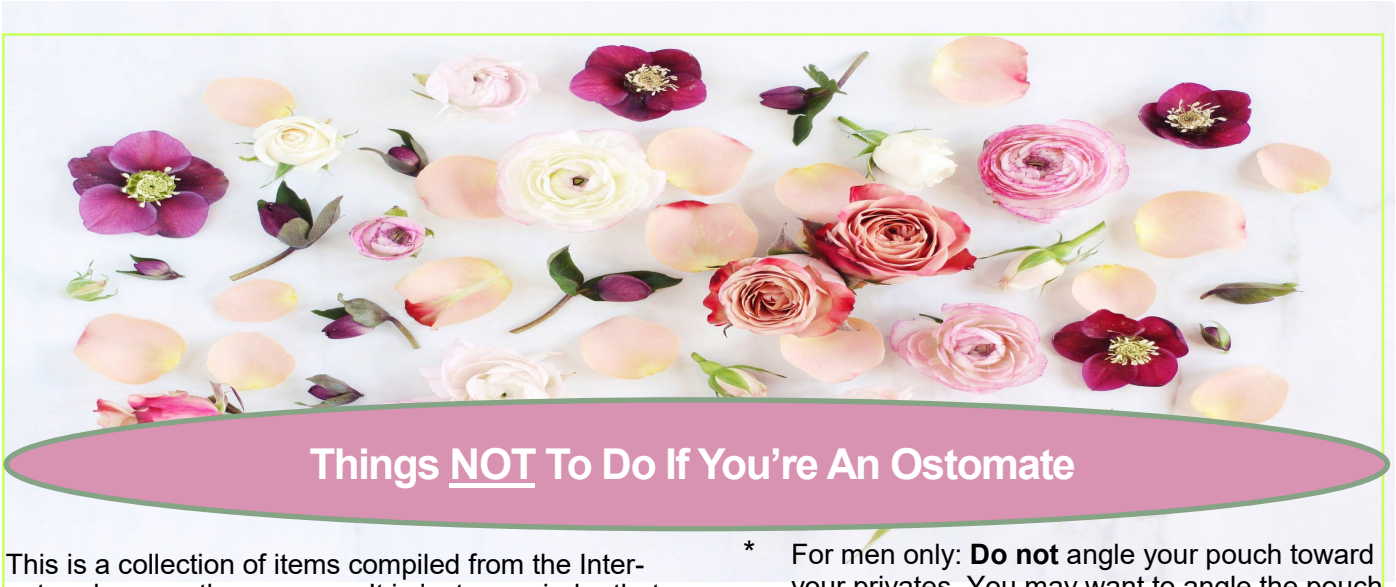
The bottom line is: We are alive!! In other times, in other countries, we might not be. Medicine and techniques today have given us an opportunity to experience this second chance. It is certainly an opportunity worth accepting and exploring. The most important part of you as a human being has not changed. You are still the **SAME** you. Never forget to actively celebrate **LIFE** and all it has to offer.

Ten Commandments for the New Ostomate

- Thou shalt not take out thy feelings of anger and frustration on thy spouse/significant other or family.
- Thou shalt not demand special consideration. Thy ostomy doth not make thee an invalid or render thee disabled.
- Thou shalt remember to use a deodorizer in the bathroom after thou has emptied thy pouch.



- Remember that thy family needs thy love and affection just as thee needs theirs.
- Honor thy WOC Nurse. She/he is your friend when you are in need.
- Thou shalt not be ashamed of thy ostomy, it may have saved thy life.
- Thou shalt be ready at all times to help others as others have helped thee.
- Thou shalt not feel sorry for thyself, instead thou shalt give thanks for a new lease on life.
- Thou shalt remember at all times that thy partner in life suffers with thee and thou shalt not add to their suffering.
- Above all thou shalt give thanks for a new life and freedom from pain.



Things NOT To Do If You're An Ostomate

This is a collection of items compiled from the Internet and many other sources. It is just a reminder that we should not take ourselves too seriously.

* **Do not** drop your clip in the toilet. It is a prudent idea to always carry a spare clip.

* **Do not** stand up too quickly when the clip is caught on the edge of the toilet seat. Most of us have gotten up too quickly and ended up stopped instantly in mid-air because the clip caught on the inside edge of the toilet seat. The clip will lift the seat and you feel like a fish caught on the end of a line. Quite a bad visual, but we only do it once, or maybe twice; no, we'll make this goof our whole lives and it will surprise us every time. This is especially a problem for a woman. Imagine being at someone's home and dropping the toilet seat loudly just before you leave the bathroom. Everyone just looks and wonders why a woman would be dropping a toilet seat.

* **Do not** dry your appliance with the hair dryer set on high. When drying your appliance with a hair dryer, use the cool setting only. Plastic melts!

* **Do not** have your dog jump on you when your pouch is full. The dog's nails will puncture the pouch.

* **Do not** drink Power Ade Mountain Blast or Gatorade Blue Bolt before a doctor visit. It turns your output bright green. This is especially true if you have an ileostomy. All food dye turns your stool the color of the dye, temporarily. It will surprise you the first time it happens. This includes Blue Hawaiians or red beets. Beets make you look like you are bleeding to death.

* For men only: **Do not** angle your pouch toward your privates. You may want to angle the pouch toward your leg. This warning is especially true if you use a drainable pouch. This will keep the clip away from your private parts. Sorry if this is a wee bit graphic for the faint of heart, but it will make you more comfortable.

* For women only: **Do not** angle your pouch toward your privates. The clip may bother you also. You have the same option. Also, keep the clip away from a sanitary napkin. If the clip gets caught on the pad's adhesive, the clip could be pulled off.

* **Do not** put a cat on your lap. A cat's claw could cause a tear in your pouch. If you sleep with a cat, they sometimes curl up next to it when you sleep to keep warm.

* **Do not** forget that beer may blow up your pouch with gas. This may be helpful when you need a flotation device.

* **Do not** lean against an oven door, barbecue grill or fireplace either accidentally or on purpose. The pouch melts quickly.

* **Do not** put underarm type deodorants around the pouch or barrier. It is made of either plastic or a latex material and will dissolve it. If you want to use some type of odor control, use mild mouthwash or a commercially made odor control product that will not harm your stoma or your pouch.

7 Unexpected Benefits to Having an Ostomy

By Allison Rosen

Here are seven unexpected benefits of having an ostomy.

1. I'll never hold up the bathroom line again.

Before my ostomy, I always used to have to sit in the aisle seat on an airplane, so I could get to the restroom quickly. I was also very aware of the beverage cart's location and got stressed and worried whenever it blocked my path. Colorectal cancer is more than a physical disease; it impacted me mentally, too. My anxiety was high all the time. Now, I can sit by the window, admire the view and just relax and enjoy the flight.

I also never have to worry about being caught short when I'm out with my friends. I can eat, drink and laugh at the movies, ballet, symphony or on road trips — and not have to wonder where the restroom is (unless I have to pee!). Because ostomy bags are always "on," I could be sitting just about anywhere "going to the bathroom," and no one would be the wiser.

That also means I'm one of the quickest people in and out of the bathroom. It only takes me a minute to empty my pouch. I don't even have to sit on the toilet seat!

2. Goodbye, hours spent on the toilet.

My stool is collected in a bag outside my abdomen, without any conscious effort on my part. So, I no longer spend hours on the toilet because I'm constipated or have diarrhea.

I did have to figure out my diet early on and adjust what I ate to normalize my output. But even when that's looser than I'd like it to be, I still don't feel any sense of urgency. I just empty my pouch more frequently, increase my fiber intake and use an over-the-counter anti-diarrheal medication until things settle down.

3. Gas is no longer an issue.

The first few months after my ostomy surgery, I noticed it would sometimes make little random noises. I had no control over when and where this happened. Because of my ostomy's location, though, it was easy to pass it off as my stomach growling because I was hungry.

Now, it hardly ever makes a sound. It also has a filter to release gas odorlessly. So, I don't have to worry about making excuses or embarrassing myself. And, since I don't pass gas in the usual way, I can't be blamed for a smelly room either. You'll just have to admit it was you — or blame the dog.

4. Outdoor adventures, ostomy style

I recently took my dream trip to South Africa with a

dozen women from all over the United States. Together, we explored Cape Town and the Winelands district, went on safari in the Gondwana Game Reserve and climbed Table Mountain. I saw penguins and zebras just feet away from me in the wild. It was my dream trip that finally became a reality.

I never would've felt comfortable doing any of that without my ostomy. When you're high up in the mountains or way out on the savannah, you have to make do with what you have and "pop a squat" if you need to go to the bathroom. Like most people, my fellow travelers had to pull down their pants and underwear and risk getting bitten by insects and inadvertently exposing themselves while they did their business. I just inched my waistband aside and emptied my pouch.

5. My childhood dream of looking like a doll became a reality

Growing up, I played with dolls a lot and always wanted to look like one in particular. Little did I know that once I was an adult, I actually would resemble her, at least in one way.

My entire large intestine, rectum, and anus had to be removed to treat my colorectal cancer, so the place where my anus used to be is now sewn up. I have what is known as a "Barbie butt" in the ostomy community.

6. There is a whole community of 'ostomates' out there

I was very hesitant to tell the first guy I dated seriously after the ostomy that I had one. But I finally did when I knew things were going to get physical. It turned out that my boyfriend's grandfather had had one, too, so he knew exactly what it was and wasn't bothered by it at all. I had no idea how common ostomies were.

I was also astonished to discover how supportive strangers could be. To help break the stigma of ostomies, I finally built up the courage to post a picture and video of myself on social media with my ostomy pouch showing. The feedback was amazingly positive. Millions of people viewed the video, and hundreds of thousands commented. Many were fellow "ostomates" or knew someone who was.

Having an ostomy is not glamorous. But sharing it so openly was liberating. It made me realize that there's a whole community of people out there like me, and many have become friends who "get it."

7. I have a new excuse to accessorize!

It's sort of a tradition in the ostomy community to give your ostomy a name, since it's your constant companion and will never leave you.

When I went on a surfing trip with a group of cancer survivors, they helped me accept my ostomy and name it "Fill," after I described its function. Right now, he's got a pouch cover on that says, **" UR: "** (check your colon). It's my way of building awareness
around colorectal cancer prevention.

The pouches themselves are usually pretty plain – either white or tan. But you can dress them up any way you want – by hiding them under bright, colorful covers as I do, decorating them with glue and sequins, or even painting them with your own designs. I see mine now as another excuse to accessorize!

Sleeping with an Ostomy: When Your Ostomy is the Enemy of a Good Night's Sleep

By Anita Prinz, RN, MSN, CWOCN

Most people think of sleep as a restful, uninterrupted period of "zzzzs" where the body rests and the mind dreams. You lay your head on the pillow and within a few minutes, you fall off into never-never land. The next morning, you wake up after about eight hours feeling refreshed for a new day. It is common knowledge that sleep is important to a person's overall health and quality of life. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that sleep is the new "vital sign" of good health. Subjective evidence suggests that individuals with a stoma suffer from sleep problems, sleep disruption and poor sleep quality.

Lack of sleep can cause fatigue, decreased concentration, moodiness and even industrial and automobile accidents. Sleep deprivation can also cause depression and impacts respiratory and hormonal functioning. The CDC reports that sleep loss and sleep disorders are an under-recognized public health problem. Unfortunately, there is a scarcity of research on the impact of an intestinal stoma on sleep. Some individuals report dreaming of emptying their ostomy bag or urinating, then wake up during the NREM phase to find that they need to void or empty their pouch. It's not known what role dreams play, but we do know that we need REM sleep for emotional well-being.

Having an ostomy can cause disrupted sleep patterns from difficulty falling asleep to challenges staying asleep. Learning how to sleep with an ostomy pouching system and avoiding rolling on it during the night is noted as one of the greatest challenges experienced by new ostomates.

Anecdotal evidence from research suggests that persons with a stoma experience more sleep disruption problems than those without a stoma. Needing to empty an ostomy pouch appears to be the most common reason for awakening from sleep for ostomates. Many individuals with ileostomies will empty their ostomy bag five to 15 times per day which invariably includes instances during night-time sleeping. Emptying frequency can be decreased by either increasing the size of the pouch/container or decreasing the amount of stoma output.

Several manufacturers make high-output pouches which are usually 14″ pouches with a spout instead of a clamp. Many ileostomates can switch from their regular, daytime pouch to a high output pouch to get longer periods of uninterrupted sleep. High output and urostomy pouches can be connected to a one-gallon night-time drainage bottle or bag. With this setup, there should be no need to get up to empty during the night. Many people think of the night-time drainage bottles only for urine, but they are indicated for liquid stool as well. While the "yuck" factor can be high, it can really help a person get a good night's sleep and sometimes that is worth a lot more than a dirty jug.

Decreasing Output

Decreasing fecal output volume is another way to stay in bed during the night. One might think, how in the world can I decrease my output? The first rule is to stop eating about two hours before bedtime. Absorbent gel packets can be used to turn a high volume of liquid stool into a smaller volume of thicker stool. You may need to experiment with the number of packets to get it right. Some people take Imodium® or eat marshmallows at bedtime to slow their gut down. "If you can't sleep, then get up and do something instead of lying there worrying. It's the worry that gets you, not the lack of sleep." ~ Carnegie

Falling asleep may be impaired when there are worries of pouch leakage, disturbing a partner getting in and out of bed, having to use the bathroom in the middle of the night, or waking up other household members. For leaks, try putting a crib pad or other waterproof cover on the bed to protect the mattress and linens. A common question is about the possibility of hurting the stoma from lying on it. Sleeping on your stomach should not hurt your stoma, but may lead to leaks if you are not cautious and the output or gas during the night cannot escape the stoma. Stoma protectors/guards might be of help for those who sleep on their stomachs or "u-shaped" pillows/neck supports.

Interesting studies have been done on colonic activity and awakening from sleep. One study of 14 healthy men showed a marked increase in colonic motor activity with awakening. Another study of individuals with gastrointestinal (GI) disorders showed awakening from sleep causes increased peristalsis resulting in dysfunctional motility and increased emptying of GI contents. Considering many individuals with a stoma have GI problems, it seems like this can make for a vicious cycle. Your body may form habits due to your perceived need to get up, so if you get up at 2:00 am every night, you will continue to wake up at 2:00 am even if you don't need to. Breaking this cycle is very challenging, but can be done with perseverance – don't get out of bed! Sleep hygiene refers to the environment and rituals you have when preparing for sleep. One of the most important recommendations from the Sleep Foundation is to go to bed and wake up around the same time every day, including weekends! All this sounds very practical, but what about the ostomy bag?

General Sleeping Tips

1. Make sure your pouch is on securely with no creases or wrinkles
2. Empty pouch before going to bed, even if there is just a little stool or urine
3. Avoid eating/drinking for two hours before bedtime
4. Consider changing your larger meal to lunch time and having a smaller meal at dinner
5. Avoid eating gassy foods before bedtime
6. To burp your bag without getting out of bed, try the Osto-EZ Vent
7. Consider using a pouch venting mechanism
8. Wear an ostomy wrap or underwear with a pocket
9. Wear a spandex tank top or camisole to secure your ostomy pouch
10. Place a pillow or rolled towel under the pouch to support it when side lying
11. Try a body pillow for support
12. Place a U-shaped neck pillow around your pouch when lying on your stomach
13. Try protective mattress padding if you are worried about soiling the bed and linens
14. Consider irrigation if you have a colostomy

Tips for Ileostomates

15. Use a high-output pouch to decrease emptying frequency and a night-time drainage bottle to collect up to a gallon of output
16. Use absorbent gel packets to thicken stool and decrease emptying frequency
17. Take 2-4 mg loperamide (Imodium®) to slow the gut down at bedtime - with your doctor's permission
18. Eat a few marshmallows or jellybeans before bedtime to slow and thicken stool Try some of these strategies to help you get settled in for a good night's sleep. Sweet dreams!

If you are having frequent leakage issues that are causing you to lose sleep and worry about leaks, you need to see an ostomy nurse to figure out a better pouching system.

Navigating Body Image After Ostomy Surgery

When you get an ostomy, most of the advice you'll hear is practical. It comes in boxes and routines: bags and baseplates, barrier strips and rings. There's talk of wear time and skin prep, of what to eat and when to empty. These logistics matter, of course; they're a necessary first step after a major surgery. But beneath this adjustment is often another layer of healing, one that goes beyond the physical.

An ostomy doesn't just change how your body works. It can also change how you feel inside. It can shift how you see your body, yourself, and your worth, affecting everything from what you wear, to where you go, to how close you let others get. Amid all this change, you might even start to wonder: ***How could I ever accept myself like this?***

For many, life with an ostomy involves the ongoing work of making peace with your body—to meet it not with shame, but with patience, gentleness, and ultimately acceptance. It's about rebuilding trust with a body that may suddenly feel unfamiliar and allowing that body to once again feel like home.

Body image after ostomy surgery

More than just how you look, body image is about comfort, confidence, and feeling like yourself. Ostomy surgery can profoundly disrupt that sense of self-connection.

A 2018 research review found that poor body image is one of the most common emotional challenges after ostomy surgery. Even when recovery is technically going well—when a WOC nurse smiles and says, "You're doing great"—you might hear a voice inside that replies, "Yeah, right," as waves of self-consciousness or grief roll in.

For many, social stigma only adds weight. Harmful myths that say ostomies are dirty or shameful can take root internally. One study found that nearly half of people with permanent colostomies experience this kind of stigma, which can erode emotional well-being and self-worth.

Even when surrounded by love, you might find yourself hiding. The shirt once worn with pride might get folded away, replaced by oversized clothes chosen more for camouflage than comfort. You might avoid mirrors, not out of vanity, but out of grief for a body that once felt like yours. Intimacy may feel distant, shadowed by the fear of being seen, touched, or rejected. **In all of this, you're not alone.**

What factors shape body image after ostomy surgery?

Body image isn't fixed; it's shaped by your history, current circumstances, and how you emotionally process change. Several key factors can influence how someone adjusts:

1. Age and stage of life.

Research shows that younger adults often experience greater body image distress after ostomy surgery. This is a time when identity, sexuality, and self-expression are still being shaped—when you're still learning who you are and how you want to be seen.

In this context, everyday moments can take on new complexity. You may find yourself doing quiet check-ins throughout the day: ***Is the bag visible? Is it full? Is it leaking?*** These small, repeated considerations can influence how you move through the world, especially in a culture where bodies with ostomies are rarely represented.

2. Reason for surgery.

The reason behind an ostomy may also impact how you adjust to life with it. Even with the same procedure, the emotional meaning is shaped by the life story it enters—and that story can be the lens through which the body is seen.

Research suggests that people who undergo ostomy surgery due to cancer, for instance, may report lower levels of body image distress. While an ostomy can be life-saving in many contexts, cancer survivors may be more likely to see it that way: as a visible mark of survival and strength.

For others, the emotional meaning may feel more complex. When surgery follows years of chronic illness, misdiagnosis, or medical trauma, for example, the experience can carry different associations. Perhaps it's not triumph, but relief, fatigue, or even resignation. One study found that some participants with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) viewed their stoma as an embarrassing complication of their condition—something tied more to shame than strength.

But meaning isn't fixed. With time, support, and self-compassion, your relationship with your ostomy can evolve, no matter the reason behind it.

3. Temporary vs. permanent ostomy.

Research also shows that temporary stomas can lead to greater body image distress. When your ostomy isn't permanent, it can feel like you're living in a body that doesn't quite belong to you—just a version you're passing through. This in-between state can create a kind of psychological limbo: it's hard to fully grieve what's been lost and hard to fully accept what is.

While permanent ostomies can bring their own grief, they may also bring a sense of clarity that limbo does not. When you know this is your body now, you may be better equipped to make peace with it.

What can help: Tips for navigating body image after ostomy surgery

1. Find the right ostomy products for you.

It's hard to feel at ease in your body when the products meant to support it don't feel reliable. Worrying about leaks, irritation, or a poor fit can quietly wear on your confidence. But when your pouching system truly works for you, it can create space for deeper healing and acceptance.

If the medical look or rustling sound of your ostomy pouch makes you feel more self-conscious, know this: not all pouches are the same. Some are designed to move with your body, to bend and stretch as you do. Some fold into a smaller shape that tucks easily under clothes. Some come in colors like black or gray, offering an alternative to a medical beige. Pair these ostomy bags with supporting products like barrier strips and moldable rings, as needed, and you can find a system that fits both your ostomy and your life.

2. Remember what your body is for.

After ostomy surgery—after the shock, the healing, and the slow return to everyday life—it's

easy to forget what your body is still doing for you.

It breathes without asking. It heals, even when you're not watching. It adapts in ways you never expected, creating space for you to live the life you want. Your body allows you to laugh, cry, rest, move, connect, and wake up to a new day. Again and again, that is something worth honoring.

3. Focus on what lights you up.

On tough body image days, it can help to shift your focus away from your body. Try asking:

What reminds me that I'm still me, despite all I have been through?

Who or what helps me feel seen beyond how I look?

What brings me joy, even for a moment?

Maybe it's the warmth of your morning tea. A dog's thumping tail when you pass through the door. A text that says, I get it.

These small lights matter. They can remind you that your life is bigger than managing a stoma, and that you're here to live in ways that have nothing to do with appearance.

4. Let go of the timeline.

Healing isn't linear. There is no "right" time to feel okay in your body again. No checklist or countdown—just you, moving through it all in your own way, in your own time.

Some days might feel lighter, like body acceptance is just within reach. Other days may stir up discomfort or grief in places you thought had healed. That doesn't mean you're failing; it means you're human. Release the pressure to arrive somewhere quickly and trust that just showing up for yourself is its own kind of progress.

Your body is still worthy after ostomy surgery

After ostomy surgery, your body is not broken. It is changed. It is not less worthy, just newly shaped.

You don't have to love every part of it. You don't have to feel grateful all the time. But your body, with its stoma and its pouch, is still here.

It's still breathing. Still yours. And still deserving of care and peace.

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

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OTHER IMPORTANT NUMBERS

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Lila Watkins 727-744-2660
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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

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