Self-Perception of Body Image in Female Patients Living with Ostomies

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**Background**

- An ostomy is the result of a surgical procedure that removes part of the colon or small intestine and reroutes the bowel to an opening, or stoma, made in the wall of the abdomen, through which stool and flatus pass (Smith, 2014).
- Individuals with ostomies experience altered function and appearance. These factors may significantly impact a patient’s perceived quality of life.
- Women living with ostomies face physical changes, social challenges, alterations in self-concept, and a changes in relationship roles.
- These challenges indicate a need for interventions specifically for women living with ostomies to promote a positive body image and improve quality of life.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of a stoma on self-perception of body image in female patients living with an ostomy.

1. How does the presence of a stoma affect body image self-perception among female patients?
2. What interventions exist to support a positive body image for females living with a stoma?

**Methods**

- An integrative literature review was conducted using Whittermore & Knafl’s (2005) methodology.
- **Search Strategy:**
  - Databases: CINAHL, ProQuest, and PsycINFO
  - Keywords: ostomy, stoma, ileostomy, colostomy, perception, body image, woman, women, and female
- **Inclusion Criteria:** peer-reviewed, written in English, published in the last 10 years, adult subjects
- **Exclusion Criteria:** other literature reviews, case studies, articles that did not specifically address body image
- **Total number of articles reviewed:** 8

**Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Appearance</th>
<th>Odor</th>
<th>Leakage</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Adaptation</th>
<th>Acceptance</th>
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**Factors Associated with Negative Body Image**

- **Appearance:** fear of partner reaction to appearance of stoma; expressing feeling different from “healthy” woman; embarrassed by abnormal peristomal skin; feeling the need to hide ostomy or stoma in public
- **Odor:** feelings of embarrassment due to odor; concerns for ballooning from gas; feeling undesirable due to smell
- **Leakage:** feeling “unclean”; concerns of leakage while at work; fear of leakage during partner contact and sexual activity

**Strategies to Promote Positive Body Image**

- **Support:** education from healthcare professionals prior to surgery; partner reassurance, partner involvement in stoma care; support from family and friends; support groups
- **Adaptation:** careful planning of daily routines, public outings, vacations; diet adjustments; adjusting wardrobe to conceal ostomy
- **Acceptance:** taking responsibility for caring for the stoma; positive reframing of situation, gratitude for health; using altered body as to raise awareness about chronic bowel disease

**Discussion/Conclusion**

- Many women experienced some form of negative self-perception of body image.
- These feelings are commonly associated with concerns about the appearance of the stoma, odor and leakage, which ultimately impact the woman’s social and emotional well-being.
- Strategies to promote positive body image and improve quality of life included adaptation of daily routines, social support, and overall acceptance of their altered appearance.

**Nursing Implications**

- An understanding of these effects would allow nurses to address the emotional and mental health of this patient population and deliver better care.

**Further Research**

- No concrete interventions by nursing staff were used or suggested in the research.
- Further research on strategies used to cope with altered body appearance and function may be useful in developing patient education programs nurses can implement to improve the perception of body image in female patient following stoma surgery.