



Low Volume Rectal Irrigation

Introduction

You have been referred for rectal irrigation as this is a specialised method of bowel management for people with chronic constipation, difficulty with bowel evacuation or bowel control problems. Rectal irrigation is a method of 'cleaning out' the lower part of the bowel using water and irrigation equipment. It is designed to be used on a regular basis to aid evacuation allowing you to manage your own bowels independently at home and have the confidence that your rectum is empty, enabling you to get on with your everyday life.

Is irrigation suitable for everyone?

No, it is only recommended following specialist evaluation and when simple bowel management options have failed. Irrigation may not be suitable if you have:

- acute inflammatory bowel disease
- anal fissure
- severe haemorrhoids or other conditions causing pain or bleeding
- unexplained changes in stool pattern
- active diverticular disease
- abdominal or anal surgery within past 6 months
- recent colonic biopsy
- cancer or radiotherapy in the abdominal or pelvic region
- long term steroid therapy
- anticoagulant therapy
- risk factors for Ischaemic colitis (atrial fibrillation, coronary artery disease, high cholesterol)
- pregnancy
- heart failure

Will I be assessed for irrigation?

Specialists with knowledge and experience of bowel problems have discussed irrigation with you as an alternative option for your bowel management. The Specialist Nurse is responsible for assessing your suitability to irrigate and demonstrated the irrigation system. You will be given training and on how to use the system and asked to attend a practical teaching session on how to use the system to ensure that you can continue to use it safely on an on-going basis by yourself or with help from someone else. Training can also be arranged in your own home by referring you to one of our Community Rectal Irrigation Nurse Advisors.

How is low volume rectal irrigation performed?

You will normally irrigate whilst sitting on a toilet or commode. A small cone with a hand pump attached (+/- an extension tube) is inserted into the back passage. Approximately 100mls of water is then pumped into the lower bowel which flushes out the bowel contents.

Irrigation is designed to be used on a regular basis to aid evacuation. A practical teaching session will be given, and you will receive the relevant support material e.g. step by step guide, written information, teaching links.

How often should I irrigate?

Some people irrigate on a regular basis either daily or a few times a week whilst others do it when they feel they need to. A certain amount of trial and error is required to find out what works best for you, but this can take a month or so.

When should I irrigate?

This depends on your lifestyle, work or individual needs. Choose a time when you do not have to rush and have access to a toilet in case you need to use it again after irrigating.

How much water should I use?

You should use enough water to stimulate rectal emptying. The amount of water used by different people will vary. Low volume rectal irrigation devices generally allow you to instil up to 125mls of body temperature tap water into your rectum. The Specialist Nurse will advise you on this.

How do I obtain equipment?

This is a single person product. Further supplies are available on prescription and can either be arranged through a home delivery service or from a chemist. The Specialist Nurse will provide you and your GP with the relevant prescription codes.

What if I need advice after I start irrigation?

Telephone or face to face follow up appointments will be arranged with the Specialist Nurse. Their contact details are provided below but you are advised to stop irrigating and make contact if you have any concerns. Support in the community may be available in certain circumstances; the Specialist Nurse will be able to advise you, should this be necessary.

Will any new medical problems affect the irrigation?

Consult a doctor for advice in case of:

- any new medical conditions

Stop irrigation and consult your GP in case of:

- blood in faeces, weight loss, abdominal pain
- changes in the frequency, consistency and colour of stools

Consult your Specialist Nurse for advice in cases of:

- Pregnancy
- Breastfeeding

Giving your Consent (permission)

The staff caring for you will need to ask your permission and ensure that you are happy to carry out rectal irrigation at home. They will gain verbal consent that states that you have agreed to the treatment and that you understand the benefits, risks and alternatives. If there is anything you don't understand or if you need more time to think about rectal irrigation, please tell the staff caring for you.

Remember, it's your decision. You can change your mind at any time, and your wishes will be respected at all times. If you would like to read our consent policy, please tell a member of staff.

Troubleshooting

Abdominal cramps	These are unlikely with Low Volume rectal irrigation as the volume of water is small. Cramps may also be a sign that the irrigation water is too cool. If you are uncomfortable then stop using the system and contact your Specialist Nurse.
Bleeding	Occasional spots of bright red blood may be seen on the cone, especially if you have haemorrhoids. This is not a cause for concern. If bleeding is occurring regularly this needs to be reported to your medical team. If a sudden major bleed occurs urgent medical attention must be sought however trauma is very unlikely when using this system.
Nothing is passed from the rectum	Your rectum may be empty, or you may need to use more water to evacuate. Possible alternative causes include dehydration or severe constipation. If nothing is passed on a regular basis please contact your Specialist Nurse for further advice.
Water is passed but no stool	This can happen if there was a good result at the last irrigation. You may need to irrigate less often if this is happening regularly. If you have not had any results for several days the stool may be hard to pass, a laxative, enema or larger volume irrigation may be required.
Water or stool leakage after irrigation	Try sitting on the toilet for longer to ensure you are empty or try using less water. It may be advisable to wear a small pad when first carrying out irrigation. This may not be necessary once you are used to irrigation.
Feeling unwell	Occasionally irrigation can make you feel unwell during or afterwards, but this is less likely with low volume irrigation. You may sweat a little, have palpitations or feel light-headed when first using the system. If you are affected in this way have someone nearby in case you need assistance. If the problem persists speak to your GP or Specialist Nurse

Pain occurs during insertion of the cone or when pumping water	You are unlikely to experience pain when using this system. If the pain persists for more than a few minutes or is accompanied by a lot of bleeding seek immediate medical assistance. The irrigation cone should slide into your anal canal easily. Never force the cone into your anal canal as this may cause bleeding, pain or injury.
Water leaking from rectum whilst pumping water	You may experience a little leakage of water during the irrigation but if you need further advice or support with the technique please contact the Specialist Nurse for further assessment.

Serious Complications – these are rare but include:

Bowel Perforation – this is reported as occurring in 1: 500 000 cases. It is a serious and potentially life-threatening complication and will require immediate admission to hospital, often requiring surgery. If you experience acute, severe, sustained abdominal pain or back pain, especially if combined with a fever and or sustained anal / rectal bleeding you must attend Accident and Emergency immediately.

The cone should slide in easily. Never force the cone into your anal canal as this may cause pain or injury and may cause a tear in the bowel wall. This is very unusual but in extremely rare cases may involve surgery to form a colostomy. Contact your Specialist Nurse if you have any problems inserting the cone.

Other risks

Include abdominal cramps (usually only present until bowel emptying is completed); worsening faecal incontinence due to leakage of irrigation fluid, minor anal discomfort or anal bleeding, nausea, dizziness and exacerbation of haemorrhoids.

Contact Details

Clare Horrobin
Clinical Nurse Specialist - GI Physiology
0121 424 7427
Good Hope Hospital

Further information

Peristeen rectal irrigation Coloplast Ltd – Charter Helpline
0800 132787 www.coloplast.co.uk

Qufora Ltd Tel: +44 (0) 800 612 90 90
info@qufora.co.uk www.qufora.co.uk

Bladder and Bowel UK: 0161 607 8219 www.bladderandboweluk.co.uk

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