

# **COLOSTOMY IRRIGATION**

## **What is colostomy irrigation ?**

This is an alternative method of bowel management for those of you who have an end colostomy that has been constructed in the last part of the large intestine or colon.

It is a procedure that allows you to instil a volume of water sufficient to cause evacuation of most of the faecal contents within the large bowel, so that you are free of bowel activity for the next one to two days.

## **Why choose irrigation ?**

This procedure provides you the opportunity to regain control of the bowel activity.

It can be done on a regular basis i.e. every day or second daily, or it can be done for social convenience i.e. say before the weekend, prior to a social dinner outing, before that big business meeting or whatever.

It provides the opportunity to be free of needing to wear an appliance pouch for a period of time.

It enhances the wear time and success of the colostomy plug if being used.

## **Irrigation criteria factors**

- Motivation, willingness to do the procedure
- Adequate manual dexterity and also reasonable eyesight
- The time to complete the procedure without rushing
- Bathroom facilities that will allow a 45 minute time frame for the procedure

## **Who cannot irrigate – factors that prevent the procedure**

- An Ileostomy i.e. small bowel stoma
- An Ileal Conduit i.e. urinary diversion
- Inflammatory bowel disease i.e. Crohn's, ulcerative colitis, irritable bowel syndrome
- Prolapse of the stoma
- Damage from irradiation treatment (*Ray Therapy*)
- Mental disorder or poor cognition
- Anxiety state
- Poor prognosis
- Loop stoma formed in the transverse or ascending colon

## **When to irrigate**

The time required to successfully irrigate is between 30 to 60 minutes. So bathroom facilities and the time of day need to be decided to the individual's best options.

It is best to irrigate at approximately the same time, i.e. establish a routine, if irrigation is to be done as the main means of colostomy management. The time of day may be either at night or in the morning or perhaps during the day if a shift worker or housewife.

Some may choose to irrigate for social convenience, the procedure is the same but it may be more convenient to irrigate before the weekend only, or prior to going somewhere special. At other times a normal appliance pouch is worn and changed as necessary.

Firstly, check with your surgeon or stomal therapy nurse to make sure this procedure is okay for you.

The procedure must be taught by a stomal therapy nurse and usually two to three teaching sessions are advised before flying solo.

Thankfully all the equipment required for this is available on the Stoma appliance scheme and funded within the structure of the scheme. A prescription from the stomal therapy nurse will ensure that you are given the right equipment.

The key to success is relaxing and not rushing the procedure. Our bowel responds to our emotional well-being, as well as our physical well-being.

### **The procedure**

An irrigation kit contains a water bag attached to a tube, with a flow regulator to control the flow of water into the bowel. A soft plastic cone is used to insert into the bowel, specially designed so that no harm can come to the bowel wall if the procedure is followed as taught.

A long plastic irrigation sleeve is worn with one end attached to the abdomen around the stoma and the other end placed into the toilet bowl. The end on the abdomen is open at the top to allow access to the stoma and for insertion of the cone.

Tap water is used for the procedure; this is warmed to body temperature which is about 37 degrees Celsius. This is important as too cold a water flow will cause cramps and too hot a temperature will burn the bowel, both factors stopping the success of the procedure.

The volume of water should not exceed between 500 to 1,000ml of tap water.

In countries where tap water is not suitable for drinking it is also not suitable for irrigating, so bottled water is then used.

Basically, the procedure is very simple. The water bag filled with water is hung on a hook so that the bottom of the bag is at shoulder level to the person irrigating. The tubing, with the regulator, is attached to the cone and the cone inserted gently into the stoma. The time for instillation of the water is approximately five minutes.

Once the water is instilled, the cone is removed and the bowel is allowed to evacuate the water and faecal contents over the next twenty minutes or so, with it passing directly into the irrigation sleeve and straight into the toilet bowl.

### **Footnote**

Irrigation does not wash out the bowel and has nothing to do with promoting a healthy intestinal tract. What it does do is stimulate a portion of the bowel above where the stoma is, enabling evacuation of the irrigating fluid and faeces.

It allows you to essentially be in charge of when your colostomy evacuates and provides freedom from the constant wearing of an appliance pouch.

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*Article by Helen Nodrum, STN, Cabrini Hospital, Melbourne*