

## **PATIENT INFORMATION**

### **What is rectal irrigation?**

Rectal irrigation (sometimes called “anal” or “transanal” irrigation) is a specialist treatment which is used for both chronic constipation and faecal incontinence (involuntary leaking of solid/liquid faeces), when other methods of management have failed. It involves instilling warm water into the rectum and lower (sigmoid) colon via the anus (back passage) to empty out the stool.

Rectal irrigation allows you to empty out your lower bowel at a time to suit you; it can give you predictability and help to relieve abdominal pain and bloating. Rectal irrigation can be combined with other non-surgical treatments for chronic constipation or incontinence. Many people say that their quality of life improves when they start rectal irrigation.

### **How is rectal irrigation performed?**

Rectal irrigation is a treatment that you can perform yourself at home. Warm water is instilled into your rectum and lower colon via your anus, using a rectal catheter or cone. The warm water stimulates the bowel to work, so that when the catheter or cone is removed, faeces (stool) and water can pass into the toilet in the same way as a normal bowel movement. Knowing that your bowel is empty will allow you to go about your daily activities comfortably and with more confidence. Normally you will be sitting on the toilet when you do this, but you can use a commode or shower chair.

There is a range of specialist equipment available and your Health Care Professional will help you choose the most suitable for you to use. They will show you how to use the equipment safely and offer ongoing support and advice.

Rectal irrigation should not be uncomfortable or painful, and becomes quick and easy to perform with practice. Some patients notice benefits straight away but typically it takes 4–6 weeks for you to get used to the treatment so that it becomes a normal part of your bowel routine. Most patients find that irrigating every second day is enough to manage their symptoms.

**Does rectal irrigation have any risks?**

Your health care professional will undertake a full assessment before gaining your consent to start you with rectal irrigation.

Rectal irrigation is very safe so long as you follow the instructions. There is a very small risk of a perforation (hole) developing in the bowel in patients who use this treatment. This risk is minimal if you follow the instructions given to you by your health care professional. Other minor complications include a small amount of bleeding, pain, nausea, and fatigue.

<b>Circumstances when rectal irrigation should not be used</b>	<b>Circumstances when caution is required if undertaking rectal irrigation</b>
Active inflammatory bowel disease	Cognitive impairment
Acute diverticulitis	Congestive cardiac failure
Anal or colorectal stenosis (fixed narrowing)	Faecal impaction
Change in bowel habit (until bowel cancer is excluded)	Inactive inflammatory bowel disease
Colorectal cancer	Kidney or liver disease
During chemotherapy	Long term steroid therapy
Ischaemic colitis	Painful anal conditions including fissure, fistula, haemorrhoids, solitary rectal ulcer syndrome
Pregnancy (even if an established user)	Pelvic radiotherapy
Within 3 months of colorectal (large bowel) surgery	Pregnancy (planned)

Within 4 weeks of polypectomy	Previous anal, colorectal or pelvic surgery
Within 12 months of having a radical prostatectomy	Previous diverticulitis or diverticular abscess
	Prone to rectal bleeding or on anticoagulant therapy (not including aspirin or clopidogrel)
	Spinal cord injury above T6 (due to risk of Autonomic Dysreflexia)
	Severe diverticulosis (diffuse disease or dense sigmoid disease)
	When rectal medications are used for other conditions
	Within 3 months of colonic biopsy

**Further information:**

You are strongly recommended to read the UK guidance on rectal irrigation published by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/mtg36/resources/peristeen-transanal-irrigation-system-for-managing-bowel-dysfunction-pdf-64371998671045>)

Examples of equipment and more information can be found on the following manufacturers' websites:

Coloplast (<https://www.coloplast.co.uk/peristeen-anal-irrigation-system-en-gb.aspx>)

MacGregor Healthcare (<https://www.macgregorhealthcare.com/about-irrigation/>)

Braun Medical (<https://www.bbraun.co.uk/en/products-and-therapies/ostomy/pioneer-in-colostomy-irrigation.html>)

January 2019