Intermountain® Healthcare

Fecal Microbiota Therapy: *Information for Donors*

What is fecal microbiota therapy?

Fecal microbiota therapy is a simple procedure that treats recurring or severe cases of an infection called **clostridium difficile** (usually referred to as *C. diff*). The most common symptoms of a ***C. diff*** infection include frequent, watery diarrhea, stomach pain and bloating, fever, nausea, loss of appetite, and weight loss. In rare cases, the bowels can rupture, potentially leading to a body-wide infection, organ failure, or even death.

During **fecal microbiota therapy**, feces (stool) is taken from a healthy person and infused into the intestines of an infected person.

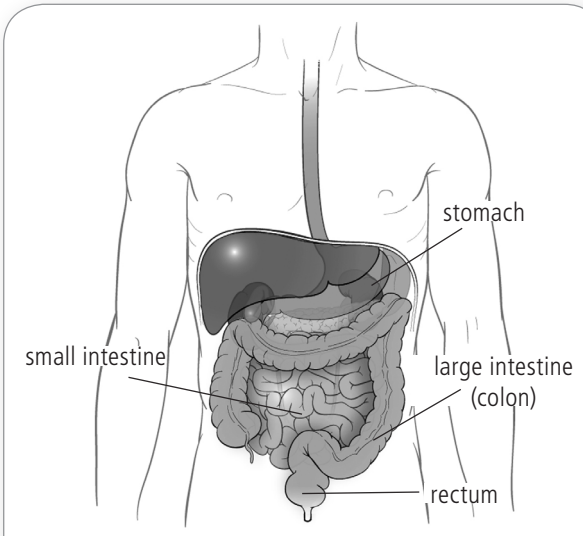
Fecal microbiota therapy is highly effective — it rids recipients of *C. diff* about 90% of the time. Many recipients' symptoms go away immediately after the procedure.

Who is most likely to get a *C. diff* infection?

C. diff spores can live outside the human body for a very long time. Spores can also be found anywhere — public places, hospital equipment, people's hands — and those spores can travel from person to person.

People in good health can usually fight off a *C. diff* infection without getting sick. **People over age 65 and people with certain medical problems** may not be able to fight off the infection as well.

Antibiotics increase the risk of a *C. diff* infection. The intestines have a healthy balance of bacteria — millions, in fact — that help protect people from getting sick. Antibiotics can sometimes kill healthy bacteria (as well as unhealthy bacteria). This upsets the balance of bacteria in the system. When this happens, *C. diff* can quickly grow out of control.



The large intestine (colon) and small intestine together are called the bowel.

What happens during fecal microbiota therapy?

Most infections of *C. diff* can be treated with antibiotics, but sometimes the infection doesn't go away. Fortunately, there's another option. Introducing healthy bacteria from the digestive system of another person can break the cycle of *C. diff* infection. This is done by transferring a small amount of fecal material from a healthy person (donor) to the infected person (recipient).

Fecal material can be transferred from the donor to the recipient using one of these methods:

- Through a **nasogastric (NG)** tube or **endoscope** inserted into the nose, past the throat, and into the stomach or bowel
- Through a **colonoscope** inserted into the rectum to the colon
- Through an **enema bag** inserted into the rectum

Patients may benefit from fecal microbiota therapy if the *C. diff* infection recurs two or more times, doesn't respond to antibiotics, or is severe.

Who can be a donor?

Donating feces for fecal microbiota therapy is a great service if you are willing and don't have any disqualifying factors. Doctors prefer the donor to be an intimate partner, someone the recipient lives with, or a family member.

If you're considering becoming a donor, a nurse will ask you screening questions to identify anything that would disqualify you as a donor. Answer honestly — your privacy will be protected, and it helps determine if there's any reason you shouldn't donate.

Who cannot be a donor?

Certain illnesses and behaviors disqualify donors because it's very important to not expose the recipient to additional problems.

You may not donate if you:

- Have **certain illnesses** or have recently been exposed to certain illnesses, such as HIV, AIDS, hepatitis, and chronic gastrointestinal (GI) conditions.
- Participate in certain **activities**, such as high-risk sexual behaviors, drug use, and recent tattoos or piercings.
- Have taken certain **medications** recently, such as antibiotics, immunosuppressants, and cancer medications.
- Have recently **traveled or lived** in countries with risk of certain diseases, including Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease ("mad cow disease"), diarrheal illnesses, and traveler's diarrhea.

What happens before donation?

Before donation, you'll work with the healthcare providers to do the following:

- **Complete screening tests.** You and the recipient will be screened for certain illnesses and bacteria. You will give blood and stool samples to be tested. Insurance may or may not cover these tests.
- **Receive directions.** Doctors and nurses will educate you and the recipient on the procedure and give you directions for providing the stool sample.

What happens when I donate?

You may be given a laxative and a container for the stool sample. The hospital or medical facility prepares the stool for infusion. This includes diluting the feces with saline and filtering the feces to remove any solid material. It is then infused into the recipient.

Is it safe?

Yes. For the recipient and the donor, fecal microbiota therapy is a safe procedure with little risk.

For the donor, there is no risk.

For the recipient, there are minor risks associated with the NG tube, colonoscopies, and enemas. There is also a minor risk of getting an infection — donor screening and stool testing should reduce that risk.

Thank you for considering becoming a donor!

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