

Let's Talk About...

Anal dilation

Anal dilation is the process of opening up or stretching the anus using small plastic dilators so it becomes a normal size. This is a treatment used after a surgically repaired imperforated anus. You will do this at home.

Why does my child need anal dilation?

Your child may need anal dilation if they had an imperforate anus repaired. Imperforate anus is a defect that is present from birth (congenital). This means that the anus opening is missing or blocked. The anus is the opening to the rectum through which stool (poop) leave the body. After surgery to repair the imperforate anus, the anal opening can become tight. If the anus is not dilated, it can scar, become narrow, and stay that way. This would prevent your child from having normal bowel movements.

Does anal dilation hurt?

Anal dilations can be uncomfortable, but not extremely painful.

What do I need for anal dilation?

You will need:

- Dilators in different sizes
- Water-based lubricant
- Someone to help you hold and position your child

At your child's clinic visit after surgery, a healthcare provider will teach you to start with the smallest dilator and increase one size per week. You'll do this until the largest dilator passes through the anus easily.



How do I do anal dilation?

- 1 Put an older child in a frog-leg position (lay face up with soles of feet together and knees apart to expose the perineum). If your baby needs anal dilation, have another person hold them with your baby's knees against their own chest.
- 2 Put a lubricant on the end of the dilator.
- 3 Gently put the dilator in the anus, twist it, and push the dilator in gently. You may feel some resistance as the muscles tighten.
- 4 Insert the dilator slowly through the ring of resistance as your child's surgeon showed you. Do not insert the dilator past the notch, or handle, on the dilator.
- 5 Leave the dilator in the anus for 30 seconds.
- 6 Take the dilator out and repeat the procedure (leaving the dilator in the anus for 30 seconds twice).
- 7 Clean the dilator.
- 8 Perform the anal dilation twice a day, in the morning and at night.

Each week, change the dilator to the next size, as your surgeon told you. Perform dilations twice a day until the anus is the right size for your child. The surgeon can then close your child's colostomy. A colostomy is a part of the anorectal malformation reconstruction.

How long will I have to give my child anal dilations?

You will need to perform dilations for about 6 months after your child's surgery. After the surgeon closes the colostomy, you will continue dilations for about 4–6 months. See the dilator goal size table to understand the best size of the dilator your child's age. This table is a guide for what dilator size is normal, but this may be different for your child.

Dilator goal size

| Child's age | Dilator size |
|--------------------|--------------|
| 1–4 months | 12 |
| 4–12 months | 13 |
| 8–12 months | 14 |
| 1–3 years | 15 |
| 3–12 years | 16 |
| 12 years and older | 17 |

After the anus is the right size, you will perform dilations less often. Once you have reached the final dilator size, follow the dilation taper schedule.

Dilation taper schedule

| Frequency (how often) | Duration (how long) |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Every day | 1 month |
| Every other day | 1 month |
| Twice a week | 1 month |
| Once a week | 1 month |
| Once a month | 3 months |



If the dilation is difficult, painful, or bloody, you will have to start dilating every day again. If you don't increase the dilator size every week, as your child's surgeon directs, the anus may stay small and it may be very hard to dilate to normal size.

When should I call my child's surgeon?

Call your child's surgeon if you see bright red bleeding that does not stop when using a dilator. A small amount of blood on the dilator or in the diaper is normal as you increase to the next size dilator.

What should I do if I have questions?

If you have further questions, call your child's surgeon.

