

Let's Talk About...

Rectal Irrigation for Enterocolitis

What is rectal irrigation?

Rectal irrigation is a way to wash retained stool and toxins out of the colon. It is most often used when a child has a serious infection in the intestines (bowels) called enterocolitis.

What is enterocolitis?

Enterocolitis (en-tere-oh-coe-LIE-tis) is a serious infection of the intestines. It can make a person very ill, even cause death. Patients with Hirschsprung's Disease (HD) are at risk for getting enterocolitis. This infection can happen before or after surgery of the intestines. Enterocolitis can happen when stool stays in the colon too long (stasis) which lets bacteria grow too much. When this happens, the bacteria make a poison called "toxin." The toxin can get into the blood and make the person very sick. Toxins need to be washed out when they collect in the intestines.

How do I know if my child has enterocolitis?

Signs of enterocolitis:

- Bloated belly
- Bad smelling diarrhea
- Fever
- Vomiting
- Watery or bloody stools
- Sleepy or sluggish

Sometimes enterocolitis is not as easy to notice. The child may have less appetite than usual or have belly cramps and stomach aches.

How is enterocolitis treated?

Enterocolitis is sometimes so bad the child has to be treated in the hospital. In the hospital, children most

often have rectal irrigations, IV (intravenous) fluids, and antibiotics (either by mouth or in the IV). Less severe enterocolitis may be treated at home with rectal irrigations and an antibiotic taken by mouth (such as metronidazole (Flagyl)).

You will be taught to do rectal irrigations at home. The solution will be a normal saline (salt solution), never use plain water. Your doctor will tell you how much solution to use. You can repeat the irrigations until you have used the amount of fluid the doctor has ordered or the fluid that comes out is clear.

How do I do rectal irrigations?

Preparation for irrigations:

- 1 Wash your hands
- 2 Find a helper
- 3 Gather the supplies:
 - Normal saline solution
 - Silicone catheter 20–24 Fr.
 - 60 mL catheter tip syringe
 - Lubricant, such as KY jelly™ or surgi-lube™
 - Two bowls, such as two emesis basins
- 4 Prepare the saline solution:
 - You can buy this in bottles. It is called saline, saline solution, normal saline, or 0.9% Sodium Chloride Solution, or
 - You can mix this up at home. Mix four cups of warm tap water with 1½ teaspoons of table salt. Do not change this recipe. Changing the recipe could be harmful. Never use plain water by itself as an enema.

Administer the irrigations:

- 1 Warm the irrigation liquid to body temperature. If you mix it yourself, use warm tap water. If the enema liquid is in a premixed bottle, you can place the bottle in a hot water bath. Never microwave the enema.
- 2 Pour normal saline solution into one of the bowls or basins.
- 3 Using a 60 mL catheter tip syringe, draw up 20–60 mL of normal saline.
- 4 Place your child on his back with his knees pulled up to his chest or in a frog-legged position (infants).
- 5 Lubricate the end of the catheter well with the lubricant.
- 6 Gently put the catheter into the rectum about four to six inches.
- 7 Allow any air of fluid to come out of the catheter
- 8 Connect the catheter tip syringe to the catheter and push in 20 mL of normal saline.
- 9 Place syringe end of the catheter over the second basin.
- 10 Disconnect syringe from the catheter and let the fluid drip into the empty basin.
- 11 Repeat this: advancing the catheter 2–3 inches with each 20mL of fluid you push in.
- 12 If the fluid does not come out, attach an empty 60mL syringe to the catheter, gently pull back on the syringe. If you feel resistance, stop, move the catheter and try again.
- 13 Repeat the irrigations until you have used the amount your child’s doctor ordered or the fluid that comes out is clear.
- 14 Discard the soiled solution into a toilet.
- 15 You may need to slide the tube in or out a little to get the fluid to drain out of the rectum completely. It is important to let the saline and stool drain out by itself before you put in more saline solution.

How often and for how long will I give my child rectal irrigations?

Your surgeon will let you know how often and how long you need to do the irrigations.

Some children get rectal irrigations for several weeks after surgery. This prevents stool from staying in the rectum. This also lowers the chance of enterocolitis.



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