Let's Talk About...

Anal Dilation

Your child's surgeon would like your child to receive a procedure called anal dilation. Dilation is another word for "opening up" or "stretching". This is to stretch the anus that is too small or to prevent the newly created anus from scarring down (for example, it might scar or become narrow and stay that way). You will do this procedure at home.

Why does my child need anal dilation?

Your child has had surgery of the anus (possibly posterior sagittal anorectoplasty or repair of imperforate anus). After this surgery, 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.

What is anal dilation?

Anal dilation is when a small plastic or metal dilator is used to stretch the anus so it can be a normal size. Dilators are small rods that are very smooth and of different sizes. They are used to gently open the anus wider. Usually, you will use a certain size for a while and then use a little bit larger one. Over time, the anus becomes a normal size.

Does anal dilation hurt?

Anal dilations can be uncomfortable, but not extremely painful.

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

You will need to perform dilations for about six months after your child's surgery.

What supplies do I need?

- The correct size dilator (your child's surgeon will let you know the correct size).
- Lubricant, such as KY jelly.
- A helper to help position and hold your child.

At your clinic visit following surgery you will be taught to start with the smallest dilator and increase one size per week until the largest (appropriate size for your child) passes easily.

How do I do anal dilation?

Perform the anal dilation before meals in the morning and at night.

- Position your child in a "frog-leg" position. If your child is a baby, have another person hold your baby with your child's knees against her own chest.
- Put a lubricant, such as KY jelly, on the end of the dilator.
- Gently place the dilator in the anus, twist and push the dilator in gently. You may feel some resistance as the muscles tighten.
- Insert the dilator slowly through the "ring" of resistance as your child's surgeon showed you. Do not insert the dilator past the notch on the dilator.
- Leave the dilator in the anus for 30 seconds.
- Take the dilator out and then repeat the procedure (so you leave the dilator in the anus for 30 seconds twice).
- Clean the dilator.

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. When the anus is the right size for your child, the surgeon can close your child's colostomy. After the surgeon closes the colostomy, you will continue dilations for about four to six months. The following is the usual dilator size when the anus is a normal size, but this may be different for your child.

Age of Child	Dilator Size
1–4 Months	#12
4–12 Months	#13
8–12 Months	#14
1–3 Years	#15
3–12 Years	#16
More than 12 Years	#17

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

How Often	For How Long
Every Day	One Month
Every Third Day	One Month
Twice a Week	One Month
Once a Week	One Month
Once a Month	Three Month

When you are performing dilation less than every day, if the dilation is difficult, painful, or bloody, you will have to start dilating every day again. Usually the dilations become painful when you are dilating with the largest two to three sizes. Sometimes parents decide not to dilate every day to avoid pain. This is wrong. You have to perform dilations twice a day, each day, again.

If you dilate the anus only once a week, this may cause a small tear in the anus tissue that heals and then opens again the next week during dilation. This can cause severe scars and the anus may get smaller. This could cause your child to have another surgery.

If you do not 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?

A small amount of blood on the dilator or in the diaper is normal as you increase to the next size dilator. If you see bright red bleeding that does not stop, call you surgeon right away.

What should I do if I have questions?

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

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