



Young Ostomates United Inc

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Young Ostomates United (YOU) Inc was formed in October 1989.

Our original website was launched in October 1998 and was available until May 2002.

We've presented here some of the more popular pages of the original site.

COLOSTOMY IRRIGATION

(As appeared in the February 1998 edition of "Ostomy Australia")

By Lilian Leonard

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Colostomy Irrigation – Guidelines for the Ostomate

by Lilian Leonard, Clinical Nurse Consultant, P.A.N.C.H.

Colostomy irrigation is an alternative method of management for people with an end colostomy in the sigmoid or descending colon (see Diagram 1). Many people find it practical and convenient, others do not.

Colostomy irrigation is a technique in which colostomates give themselves an enema via their stoma which promotes evacuation of stool from the large bowel. This allows the colostomate complete freedom from the passing of stools for approximately 24 to 48 hours.

Colostomy irrigation allows ostomates to become "boss of their bowel". You dictate to your bowel when you are going to have a bowel evacuation. In many ways it is more convenient than the old days before you had a stoma. For example, before a plane trip or weekend away, spend approximately an hour of your time using this procedure; your bowel is empty and you can fly or go away with your mind at ease.

The secret of success is to be relaxed and at ease with the procedure – be assured it cannot damage the lining of your bowel and has no harmful side-effects. I have patients who have been irrigating every second day for twenty years or more.

To attempt colostomy irrigation you require permission from your surgeon. To obtain irrigation equipment from your

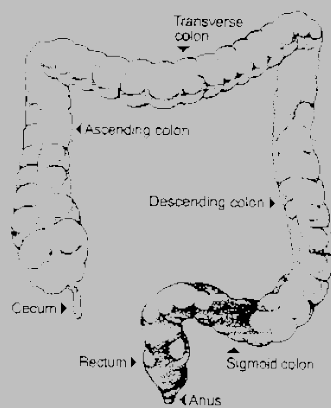


Diagram 1.

ostomy association, you need a signed certificate from your Stomal Therapy Nurse (STN). Make enquiries and choose an STN who is very familiar with and competent in this procedure. Most people require only one teaching session. If you feel comfortable with the idea, invite your partner to come and watch. When you try this in the privacy of your own home, two heads are often better than one.

The STN usually works out the regime for you to strictly follow for the first few days. Then, when you feel comfortable, do your irrigation when it suits you – remember you are boss of your bowel. Don't let your stoma rule your life – you do it when it suits you. I always give my patients my work phone number so they can ring if they are having problems, particularly in the early learning days.

The frequency of irrigation is variable. However, initially I advise that it be done daily until there is no leakage – gradually lengthen the frequency to two days. It usually takes two weeks for the bowel to adapt to the procedure. Then a regime can be chosen to suit the individual needs of the person. The time of day that irrigation is performed is irrelevant – most prefer the morning, while others find the evening more convenient. Desirably, each irrigation should be done at the same time each day, but this is not essential.

Type of fluid: Warm tap water – if the water is too cold it will cause cramps and if too hot, it can burn the lining of the bowel. Just be sensible. **The amount of fluid** used depends on your build – average build (60kg to 80 kg) use 1 litre (about 1½ pints); larger builds, up to 1¼ litres (about 2 pints). The aim is to let the water travel along the entire length of the large bowel or colon to the ileo caecal valve – this is like a little trapdoor between the small and large bowel and does not allow the water to enter the small bowel. "Nature is pretty terrific, isn't it!"

Many people, when first attempting irrigation, insert a few hundred mls of fluid, feel the pressure building up, so they remove the cone – so, of course, water and faeces come out. But if all the fluid is not inserted at the one time, the water will not reach the farthest end of the large bowel and your irrigation will only last twelve hours or so. If you feel the pressure building up, just turn the control clamp off. RELAX – take a few deep breaths, then slowly turn the control clamp on again until the full amount of water has been inserted. In places like Australia, U.S.A., Canada and Europe the tap water is fine. If travelling in areas where you would not drink the tap water, boil it for three minutes, then let it cool.

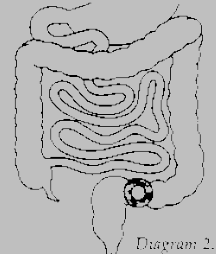


Diagram 2.

Handy Hints:

1. The hook above the toilet must be shoulder height, when standing, no lower. With regulator clamps on all irrigation equipment, it doesn't matter if it is higher. When travelling, it easily fits over the shower rail. (One of my patients was a travelling salesman. He left an array of self-adhesive hooks in motel toilets wherever he stayed).

Be relaxed and stay seated when inserting the water – if you stand up the water will back-flow.

2. Always lubricate the cone – most stoma associations sell a suitable lubricant. Some are available on the Stoma Appliance Scheme. Clinigel or KY Jelly are two popular brands also available at chemists and larger supermarkets.
3. There is a wide range of irrigation equipment available. Ask your STN to show them to you, and when you go to trade displays, check them all out, as well as the different types of irrigation sleeves. The equipment is continually being updated. Some of the irrigation sleeves have a hydrocolloid backing and stick directly on to your skin. Others have face plates and belts. Others are two-piece with a base plate that clips on to the irrigation sleeve.
4. Flow of water: one litre in 5 minutes is average – too fast and you will get cramps, too slow and the water will be absorbed through the lining of the bowel. Occasionally people will say: "I put all the water in and nothing came out!" They are probably a bit dry and their body absorbed the fluid. Don't worry, try again in a few hours.
5. If you have a very sluggish bowel: one sachet of Fibrogel twelve hours prior to irrigation helps to make a good evacuation.
6. Irrigation can also be used for people who have on-going pain and require pain killers, particularly those containing Morphine or Codeine. Pain control is of number one importance, but constipation can cause increased discomfort – regular irrigation can prevent this.
7. We all like throwing up our heels occasionally. If you have been to a party, had hot spicy foods, or a few drinks, don't take any risks – irrigate the next morning.
8. Irrigation also enables you to get rid of some of that embarrassing gas. Do you know – an average person passes approximately 400 mls of gas daily!!!

Don't be perturbed with all the do's and don'ts.

RELAX – give it a go and in a few weeks you will be "IN CONTROL". Just a case of inserting a litre of tap water into your bowel over five to ten minutes. Using the cone which is soft and tapered, you cannot damage your stoma or your bowel.