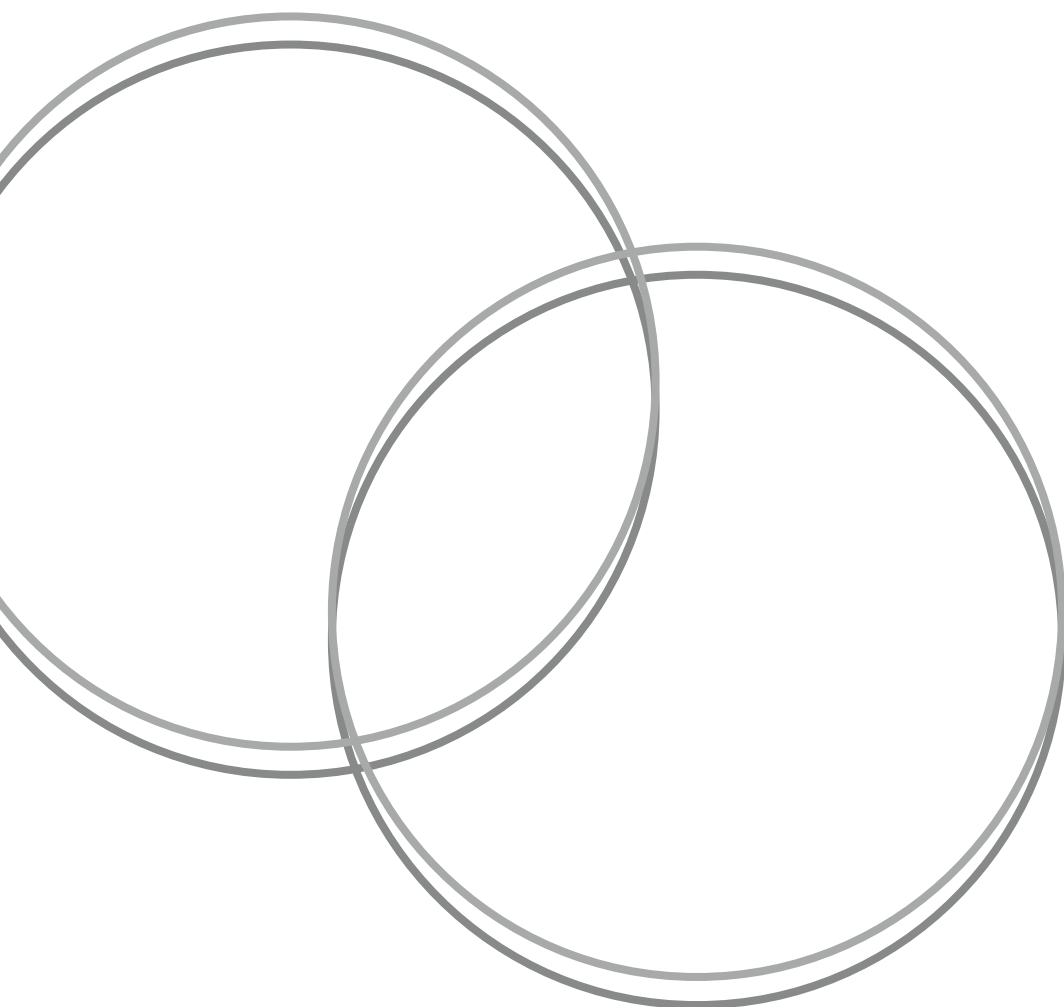


# Rectal irrigation

**Information for patients**



## **What is rectal irrigation?**

Rectal irrigation, also called 'anal irrigation' or 'trans-anal irrigation' is a system for flushing out the contents of the left side of your large bowel (colon). It can be extremely useful for people who suffer from chronic constipation or bowel incontinence, and wish to control bowel emptying at their own convenience and in privacy. Many patients find it improves their quality of life enormously.

It should not be confused with 'colonic irrigation' or 'colonic hydrotherapy', which is offered in some salons and spas, in which the whole large bowel is flushed out during the appointment. Rectal irrigation is a system prescribed by your doctor which is designed to give you long term control over when your bowels open.

## How does it work?

Rectal irrigation is carried out by yourself in your own bathroom, whilst sitting on the toilet. You will be fully trained in how to use the equipment in the clinic, or a home visit can often be arranged if you would prefer this, or need additional support.

Warm water is introduced into the rectum using specially designed equipment which is prescribed by your GP. A small, soft, lubricated tube, or cone, is inserted into the rectum, and warm (body temperature) water is gently introduced whilst you sit over the toilet.

This stimulates the bowel to contract, pushing out the contents through the back passage once the cone or catheter is removed. Because it stimulates contractions through the bowel, the whole of the lower bowel empties. This minimises the risk of constipation or bowel accidents, allowing you to go about your daily activities comfortably, and with more confidence.

It should not be uncomfortable or painful, and with practice it becomes reasonably quick and easy to use.

## **What will happen at my appointment?**

Your first appointment with the Specialist Nurse/ Health care professional (HCP) will last approximately 1 hour. They will firstly ask you questions about your medical history to make sure that irrigation is suitable for you. They will then show you the different types of equipment and demonstrate how to use them. Together you will decide which is the most suitable equipment for you. You will not be using the equipment at the appointment, and you will not need to undress or have any examination.

The nurse or HCP will write to your GP and ask them to prescribe the equipment. The HCP can also arrange for the manufacturer to deliver the equipment quickly and discreetly to your home address if you would like this service.

The nurse will phone you after approximately 6 weeks to see how you are getting on and to answer any questions you may have. You may be reviewed again after around three months to make sure that all is well, and so that the nurse /HCP can help you to make any final adjustments to your irrigation routine. If you are managing well you will then be discharged back to the care of your GP.

## **What are the risks?**

As long as instructions are carefully followed and you have a medical assessment before undertaking rectal irrigation, it is a very safe procedure.

There is a very small risk of perforating the bowel (1 in 500,000). Other minor complications can include a small amount of bleeding, pain, nausea and fatigue.

A sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy (camera check of your bowel) needs to have been performed and reviewed prior to you commencing trans-anal irrigation.

## **Is it suitable for me?**

Rectal irrigation may not be suitable for everyone, for example if you have recently had surgery to your bowel or have some medical conditions, but this will be discussed with you prior to considering or commencing this as a management of your bowel difficulties.

## **How to contact us**

**Email:** [pelvicfloor.advice@ouh.nhs.uk](mailto:pelvicfloor.advice@ouh.nhs.uk)

**Telephone:** 01865 235 881



## Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

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Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

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