

# Antegrade Continence Enema (ACE) Irrigation

## Common problems and solutions

ACE irrigation means to flush the bowels with salt water (saline) to cause a bowel movement. Fluid goes in through an opening (stoma) in the lower stomach. This flyer will help with problems that might happen during ACE irrigation.

### What is ACE irrigation?

If your child has had an operation for ACE, they will have an opening (stoma) in their lower stomach. ACE irrigation happens when you put a salt water solution (saline) into the stoma. Flushing the bowels in this way causes a bowel movement. The flyer called “[Antegrade Continence Enema \(ACE\) Surgery](#)” tells you the steps to take to flush your child’s bowels.

### How can I prevent my child from having problems with ACE?

Make sure the stoma stays wide enough to put a tube (catheter) in it. You can do this by putting a catheter into the stoma opening every day for 3 to 5 minutes. You should put the catheter in the stoma every day even if you will only put fluid into your child’s bowels every other day.

It is best to irrigate at the same time every day, about 20 to 30 minutes after a meal.

### What problems might happen?

Sometimes, there are some problems with ACE irrigation. The information on the next few pages will help you to prepare for some of these problems and will give you some ideas about how to solve them. If you are not sure what to do, call your child’s provider at the number in the “To Learn More” box on the last page.

### Common Problems and Tips to Solve Them

Here are some of the problems that your child might have with the ACE. Each section below will tell you some of the reasons that the problems might be happening or what to look for, and some things that you can try to solve the problems. If these steps do not help, call your child’s healthcare provider.

It may take a few months after the ACE surgery to find out what solution and schedule works best for your child. Also keep in mind that your child’s ACE irrigation program may need to change over time as they grow and develop.

#### Stenosis

“Stenosis” means that the opening in your child’s stomach closes or tightens. You will notice that stenosis is a problem when:

- It is hard or painful to put the catheter into your child’s stoma

Things that might help:

- Put the catheter into the stoma, tape it in place and leave it in for 3 days.
- Remember that the catheter must be put into the stoma every day, even if you do not irrigate your child's bowels every day.
- Call your child's nurse if you cannot put the catheter into your child's stoma

### Diarrhea

You might notice that diarrhea is a problem if your child is:

- Sick
- Constipated, and having soft stool come from behind hard stool
- Taking medicines that can cause diarrhea (like antibiotics)
- Eating different things than they usually do
- Having changes in daily routines

Things that might help:

- Use 5 to 10 cc less solution when you flush your child's bowels.
- Have your child eat more fiber (see other flyers, like "[Healthful High Fiber Snack Combinations](#)," "[Bright Ideas for Bran](#)" and "[Diet and High Fiber Foods](#)").
- If your child seems to be sick, call their healthcare provider.

### ACE irrigation does not make your child have a bowel movement

Bowel flushing might not work if:

- Your child is sick.
- They have changes in their daily routines.

Things that might help:

- Use 5 to 10 cc more saline solution.
- Add glycerin to the solution to help with bowel movements. Use equal amounts of water and glycerin. Avoid using more than 100 cc of solution total.
- Try giving a rectal enema to clear rectum. Ask your child's nurse about how to do this.
- Give your child a lubricant to be taken by mouth. Docusate is one kind of lubricant.
- Call your child's provider if you have flushed your child's bowels 2 times and they have not had a bowel movement yet. You will need to make an appointment.

### Nausea or throwing up

Your child might feel sick to their stomach or throw up after ACE irrigation if:

- The saline solution goes into your child's bowels too quickly.

Things that might help:

- Give your child the solution more slowly.
- Wait a longer time after your child's meal to flush their bowels.

### Leaking around the stoma

You might notice problems with the stoma if the skin around it is red and irritated. Some of the reasons for this might be:

- Your child is sick.
- There is a problem with the way the catheter is put in.
- There is a stool ball blocking the part where the catheter goes into the stoma.
- Your child may need an X-ray to check for constipation or blockage.

Things that might help:

- Put a zinc oxide cream or ointment (like Desitin) around the stoma as a skin barrier.
- The catheter may not be in far enough. Try putting it in a little deeper.
- Check with your child's healthcare provider. There may be problems with the ACE that need to be fixed.

### Accidents or leaking from rectum

Rectal leaking can happen if:

- Your child is sick.
- Your child is constipated and has soft stool leaking around hard stool.
- Your child is taking antibiotics.

Things that might help:

- Before giving the basic irrigation solution through the ACE stoma, give your child a rectal enema with bisacodyl. Make sure it is phosphate-free.
- Try giving your child a laxative (like Dulcolax, Senokot or MiraLax) by mouth.
- Increase the amount of fiber your child is eating. You can find recipes on the flyer called "[High-Fiber Foods](#)."
- If leaking is still a problem after 5 to 7 days, please call your child's doctor or nurse. Your child might have a bowel blockage, and you may need to bring your child in for an X-ray of their stomach.

### Pain

Your child might have a problem with pain when:

- You put the catheter in or when they have bowel movements

Things that might help:

- If it hurts your child when you put the catheter in, try putting it in and leaving it in for 3 days.
- Call your child's nurse if your child has pain with bowel movements.

### Bowel movements happen later than you expect

Your child's bowel movement might take a long time after flushing their bowels. Signs of this problem are:

- It always takes longer than 60 minutes from the time you flush your child's bowels until they have a bowel movement.
- Sometimes, but not always, it takes a longer time for your child to have a bowel movement after you flush their bowels.

Things that might help:

- Try changing the solution that you use for your child. Always avoid using more than 100 cc of fluid total. Ask your child's provider if you need help making changes. Here are some ways to change it:
  - Add phosphate-free bisacodyl enema solution to the regular normal saline solution with glycerin.
  - Use more solution. Use an equal amount of glycerin and saline.
- Try giving an oral laxative to make the bowel movement happen sooner.
- Have your child eat more foods with fiber in them. Ask your child's provider how much fiber they need. You can also use this formula: add 5 to your child's age. This is how many grams of fiber your child should eat (until age 25).
- Have your child drink 8 glasses of liquid a day. Water is best, and at least 4 of the 8 glasses of liquid should be water.
- Do ACE irrigation at the same time each day. After a meal is best.
- Try giving your child a laxative (like Dulcolax, Senokot or MiraLax).
- Try giving your child stool softener like mineral oil. Call your child's health provider if you have questions about this.

### Cramps

Your child might have different kinds of pain or cramps in their stomach or bowels. Here are some of the kinds of cramps that might be a problem:

- Your child feels pain when you put in the catheter or fluid.
- Your child might have more or worse cramps than usual.

### To Learn More

- Urology 206-987-2509
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- [www.seattlechildrens.org](http://www.seattlechildrens.org)

### Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your child's nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.
- For Deaf and hard of hearing callers
- 206-987-2280 (TTY)

### Things that might help:

- Warming the solution to body temperature, 99 degrees (baby bottle temp)
- Administering the irrigation after or during a bath or shower when the child is warm and relaxed
- Use less solution. Ask your child's provider about how much to use. It is best to use 10 % less. To find out how much this is, you can multiply the amount you are using now by 0.9.
- Try giving your child the solution more slowly.
- If you are using glycerin in the solution, use 5 cc less glycerin and use 5 cc more water or saline.
- The problem may go away as your child's bowels get used to working better and more quickly.
- Call your child's nurse or doctor if the pain or cramps do not go away.

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Seattle Children's offers interpreter services for Deaf, hard of hearing or non-English speaking patients, family members and legal representatives free of charge. Seattle Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call the Family Resource Center at 206-987-2201.

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children's. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's healthcare provider.

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