Antegrade Continence Enema (ACE) Flush

Common problems and solutions

ACE 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 an ACE flush.

What is ACE?
If your child has had an operation for ACE, they will have an opening (stoma) in their lower stomach. An ACE happens when you put a salt water solution (saline) and/or a soap stimulant, such as glycerin, into the stoma. Flushing the bowels in this way causes a bowel movement. See our handout “Antegrade Continence Enema (ACE) Surgery” (www.seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE207.pdf) for 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 flush at the same time every day, about 20 to 30 minutes after a meal.

What problems might happen?
Sometimes, there are some problems with an ACE flush. 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 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 flush your child’s bowels every day.
- An ACE stopper may be available, ask your healthcare provider how to purchase this.
- Call your child’s nurse if you cannot put the catheter or stopper 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:
- Give your child soluble fiber such as Benefiber, Citrucel and Pectin if recommended by your child’s healthcare provider.
- If your child seems to be sick, call their healthcare provider.

The ACE flush 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:
- Try giving a rectal enema to clear rectum. Ask your child’s nurse about how to do this.
- 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 the ACE flush if:
- The saline solution goes into your child’s bowels too quickly.
Things that might help:

• Prehydrate by giving your child electrolyte fluid, such as Gatorade, 45 minutes to 1 hour before the flush.
• 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 flush solution through the ACE stoma, give your child a rectal enema with saline. Make sure it is phosphate-free.
• Increase the amount of fiber your child is eating.
• 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
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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:
• Ask your child’s provider if you need help making changes.
• 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 the ACE flush at the same time each day. After a meal is best.

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.

Things that might help:
• Warming the solution to body temperature, 99 degrees (baby bottle temp)
• Administering the flush after or during a bath or shower when the child is warm and relaxed
• Try giving your child the solution more slowly
• 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.

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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