

Trans Anal Irrigation (TAI)

Introduction

This leaflet gives you information about using a Trans Anal Irrigation (TAI) system.

Anal washout or irrigation is a method of clearing the lower bowel and found to be an effective way of managing chronic constipation and faecal incontinence. This method of treatment will only be tried when less invasive methods of bowel management have failed. There are several systems available however the principle of them all is the same.

Depending on individual assessed symptoms, treatment will often include dietary measures, adjusting fluid intake, bowel habit patterns, evacuation techniques, medication and pelvic floor muscle training.

What is Trans Anal Irrigation (TAI)?

TAI helps empty the lower bowel. It involves introducing a high volume of tepid tap water into the large bowel through a special device attached to a cone or rectal catheter inserted into the rectum (back passage). The water stimulates the bowel by gentle stretching and softens the faeces which will encourage bowel emptying. The water is emptied from the lower bowel with the faecal contents, into the toilet.

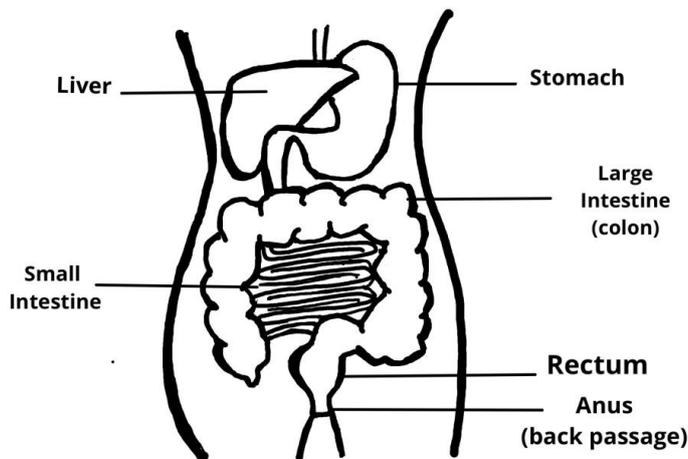


Figure 1: Diagram of the abdomen

Reference No.

GHPI1616_10_20

Department

**Gloucestershire
Continenence**

Review due

October 2023

Patient Information

Your healthcare professional will discuss with you the procedure of the system that you are to use. You will then be encouraged to perform the procedure independently, but the procedure can be carried out by a carer or healthcare professional.

You should soon get used to using your TAI system and will establish a new routine for managing your bowels. Many patients find they can stop using their prescribed laxatives once they have an effective routine.

Your healthcare professional or specialist nurse will be able to advise you and answer any questions that you may have.



Figure 2: Independent Trans Anal Irrigation (TAI)

Who can use TAI?

TAI helps people who have:

- Neurogenic bowel dysfunction such as spinal cord injury, spina bifida, multiple sclerosis etc.
- Chronic constipation, including difficulty removing the contents of the large bowel and/or due to a slow trans gut/bowel.
- Chronic faecal incontinence.

What are the benefits of TAI?

- Regaining control of when and where you have your bowels open.
- Reduces the risk of constipation by preventing the build-up of faeces.
- Reduces faecal incontinence and leakage between each bowel movement.

Patient Information

- Improves your quality of life, promoting dignity and independence.
- Allows social activity without fear of any bowel accidents.

Are there any risks or complications?

Some patients experience minor or temporary problems, such as abdominal discomfort or slight anal bleeding.

There is a very small risk of causing a tear in the bowel, if the rectal catheter is not inserted correctly. This risk is low if you follow the instructions given to you by your healthcare professional.

When should you perform TAI?

- You will get best results if you use TAI at the same time each day.
- Eating and drinking (particularly a hot drink) may stimulate a bowel movement. Therefore irrigating 20 to 30 minutes after eating or drinking could give you the best chance of achieving a good result with TAI. After breakfast is a common time to establish a routine.
- Choose a time that will fit into your lifestyle.

How many times should I use TAI?

When you first start to use TAI it is recommended you use the system daily for 2 weeks.

Over these 2 weeks your healthcare professional will ask you to keep a record of your irrigation and bowel movements. They will give you a TAI record chart to complete. This will help you and your healthcare professional to decide how often you need to use TAI.

Most patients need to irrigate 2 to 3 times a week. Some symptoms may require you to irrigate more often, for example alternate days or even daily. You will soon learn what works best for you.

Patient Information

How much water should I use?

You can irrigate with as much water as you can tolerate. Most patients will start with 500 to 800mls per irrigation. It is a case of trial and error as to what amount of water you are able to tolerate and that allows you to successfully empty your bowel. When first using the system start with 500mls and build up or down depending on the result you pass. Some patients can use as much as 1000 to 1500mls while others find irrigating in two stages more tolerable.

How best to use TAI?

Always read the manufactures instructions on how to set up and use your prescribed system. The basic steps:

- Fill the reservoir with tepid water as per the manufacturer's instructions.
- Assemble the equipment connecting all the elements together following the manufacturer's instructions.
- Prime the tubing with tepid water from the reservoir as per the manufacturer's instruction.
- Activate or apply a lubricant on the rectal cone or catheter.
- Sit on the toilet or commode.
- Gently insert the rectal cone or catheter into your back passage as far as the system indicates. You should never need to use any force. If you do experience difficulty, stop and remove the cone/catheter and check that your back passage is not full of impacted faeces. You may have to use a lubricated finger to remove any hard faeces from your back passage before you try again. If you continue to experience difficulties inserting the device please contact your healthcare professional for advice.
- If you are using a system with a balloon catheter, inflate the balloon as per the manufacturer's instructions.
- Start irrigating the water into the back passage as per the manufacturer's instructions
- Remove the rectal cone/catheter once you have inserted the recommend volume of water. If you are using a balloon catheter remember to deflate the balloon before removing from your back passage.
- Water and stool should empty into the toilet once the rectal cone/catheter has been removed.

Patient Information

- Allow time for your bowels to empty, relax for at least 10 to 15 minutes and then try to lean forward, cough, massage your abdomen or rock backwards and forwards to encourage the emptying process. Never strain, it varies with individuals how long this process takes. New users might have to stay on the toilet or commode but this should not be longer than 30 minutes.
- When you have finished emptying your bowels clean and dry the back passage as normal.
- Empty any remaining water from the reservoir container and tubing.
- Dispose of the rectal cone/catheter in the waste bin.
- Store the equipment in a dry place away from direct sunlight.

Frequently asked questions

What if I want to travel or go on holiday?

- TAI should not restrict your travel or holidays. You should use bottled or cooled boiled water in places where the tap water is not safe to drink.

Your diet may be different when away from home and this can affect your bowel frequency and consistency of faeces. You might need to irrigate with more water in hot climates, as you may be more susceptible to dehydration. Being dehydrated will make your bowel absorb more water reducing the amount of fluid being irrigated, causing the faeces not to be emptied properly. Please make sure that you drink plenty of fluid.

A letter from your GP or healthcare professional explaining that you are carrying a medical device may be helpful when you are travelling abroad.

Is the water temperature important?

- You should always use tepid water, warm to touch. Water that is cold can cause abdominal cramps. Hot water can cause irritation or damage to the lining of your rectum/colon.

**Patient
Information****What if I experience pain when performing TAI?**

- If you experience abdominal or anal pain - **stop the irrigation immediately**. If the pain continues for more than a few minutes or is accompanied by bleeding seek medical help ring GP or 111 for advice.

What if I experience abdominal cramps when performing TAI?

- If you experience abdominal cramps this may be due to running the water into the bowel too quickly. Try running the water more slowly or stop for a minute and restart when the cramps settle. Cramps may also be a sign that the temperature of the irrigation water is too hot or cold.

What if I experience bleeding when performing TAI?

- Occasional spots of blood may be seen when removing the rectal catheter; this should not be cause for concern. If you are bleeding regularly then let your healthcare professional know. If you have a sudden major bleed **seek urgent medical attention by contacting 999**.

What if I feel unwell after TAI?

- You may feel dizzy or light headed, this usually passes as you get used to TAI. Ask your healthcare professional for advice.

What if I am sweating or have palpitations or dizziness while doing TAI?

- If you have a spinal cord injury this may be a sign of Autonomic Dysreflexia (AD). If you suffer already with Autonomic Dysreflexia make sure that you have your medication close by. Instil the water slowly and do not stay too long on the toilet. If this is a new symptom for you, stop the irrigation immediately and ring 999.

**Patient
Information****What if I am unable to have a bowel movement after TAI?**

- You may be dehydrated. Try drinking 2 litres of fluid a day, more when the weather is hot. Your rectum may be full of very hard faeces and needs to be removed first before you can proceed.

Regular use of irrigation should stop constipation happening. Ask your healthcare professional for advice.

If you have been using the TAI regularly and have had successful results then your rectum and lower bowel could be empty. Try reducing the amount of times you perform TAI in a week but never completely stop the procedure, because your bowel dysfunction is likely reoccur.

What if only water is passed but no faeces?

- There may not be any faeces to pass especially if you had a good result the last time you irrigated. You may need to irrigate less often if this is happening regularly. If you have not had any results for several days your faeces may be very hard and impacted. Please contact your healthcare professional for advice.

What if I leak water or faeces after TAI?

- Try sitting on the toilet or commode longer to make sure that you have emptied your bowel. Reduce the amount of water you are using to irrigate. You may have to irrigate in 2 stages to allow time for the faeces to move along your bowel. Try 2 smaller volumes rather than 500 to 800ml. Neurogenic/spinal patients might have to stimulate their rectum with a lubricated finger to encourage complete bowel emptying. If you are incontinent of faeces between irrigations, you may need to irrigate more often. It may be necessary to wear a small pad. Ask your healthcare professional about trying other devices for small leakages of faeces such as an anal plug.

What if my bowel has not emptied completely between irrigations?

- You might have to irrigate more frequently or repeat the procedure again later in the day?

Patient Information

Can I stop taking laxative medication or bulking agents?

- It is advised that if you were taking laxatives or bulking agents before starting TAI you should continue until you have established a routine and are having successful results. Most patients find that they can gradually stop taking these medications once they are confident with the TAI.

What if I cannot sit on a toilet or commode? Can I still try TAI?

- Irrigation should normally be carried out in a sitting position to allow gravity and encourage the bowel to empty. A patient can be hoisted over a commode to facilitate this position. For patients who are nursed in bed there are TAI systems designed for this. Ask your healthcare practitioner for advice.

What if I stop performing TAI?

- You need to discuss, with your healthcare practitioner, the reasons why you want to stop irrigating. It can take 6 to 8 weeks to become familiar with TAI. Talking through the problems you are having with TAI and continuing support from your healthcare practitioner will help you to become successful at achieving good TAI results. It does take practice and does need to be done on a regular basis in order for a bowel routine to be established. Some people do find the procedure unacceptable and inconvenient and may not find the treatment effective. TAI is an invasive, time consuming procedure and you can decline this method of bowel management.

What happens if my medical condition changes or I have bowel or abdominal surgery?

If you have bowel or abdominal surgery you must stop TAI and ask your healthcare professional for advice. If your health changes and you have concerns about TAI please contact your healthcare professional for advice.

**Patient
Information**

How do I get supplies?

Your healthcare professional will arrange your first prescription by informing your GP to prescribe the TAI device. Your GP will need to continue prescribing the device and you can either collect your products from your local chemist or through a home delivery service which your healthcare professional will discuss with you.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or need advice please contact the Gloucestershire Bladder & Bowel Health team and ask to speak with a Continence Specialist.

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Content reviewed: October 2020