

What is rectal dilation?

Rectal dilation is a treatment for children who have a narrow rectum and anus.

- The anus is the opening in the body where stool (bowel movement) comes out.
- The area inside the body leading to the anus is called the rectum.
- The word dilation means to stretch or open.

Dilators are smooth plastic rods. They come in different sizes. You will put a dilator in your child's anus to help stretch it to a normal size.

Why does my child need it?

Your child may need this treatment if they were born with a rectum or anus problem. They may need surgery to fix the problem first. Your child may need dilations if they:

- Were born with a small anus opening (anal stenosis).
- Had surgery to fix the anus.
- Has Hirschsprung disease.

After surgery, your child will need dilations for a certain amount of time. This is to help make sure it heals well and to keep the anus from closing.

How often should I do it?

Your child's doctor will tell you how often and for how long to dilate your child's anus. The doctor will also decide what size dilator to use for your child.

- This is based on your child's needs and size.
- You may need to increase the size of the dilator based on your doctor's instructions.

Do the dilations hurt?

The dilations may not be comfortable for your child, but they **should not** cause pain that needs pain medicine.

If your child had recent surgery on the anus, they may need medicine before the dilation while they still have stitches. Follow your doctor's instructions or the medicine label to give your child the right dose.

What supplies do I need?

You will need:

- The right size dilator
- Water soluble jelly (such as K-Y Jelly or Surgilube)

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

Rectal dilation, continued

How do I do it?

Do the dilations at the times of day advised by your child's doctor. It is often helpful to have another person to help you hold your child. Follow these guidelines for dilation:

1. Wash your hands well with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
2. Lay your child on their back. Position them so you can see the anus.
3. Place a small amount of a water soluble lubricant on the dilator. Smear it around the end with your hand.
4. Gently put the dilator into the anus as you were taught.
 - Do not force the dilator.
 - Put it in about 1 to 1½ inches or to the mark on the dilator that your doctor told you.
5. Leave the dilator in the anus for the amount of time your doctor says.
6. Remove the dilator. You may see a few drops of blood. This is common.
7. Repeat the dilations based on your doctor's instructions.
8. Clean and diaper your child when dilations are complete.
9. Wash the dilator with soap and water.
10. Wash your hands again with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
11. Hold and comfort your child.

How can I help my child feel more at ease?

These tips can help your child feel more at ease:

- Place the dilator on your child's skin near the anus, so they can get used to the feel.
- Do the dilations at the same time each day. This can help your child accept them as part of their routine and make it less stressful.
- Some parents find that holding their child's knees together makes inserting the dilator easier.
- Parents may provide distraction (such as using toys, music or peek-a-boo) while doing dilation.
- Follow the doctor's instructions very closely to help prevent scar tissue from forming. Scar tissue makes it very hard to stretch the anus and can cause pain for your child.

Will my child remember this?

There is nothing to suggest that children remember the dilations when they are older.

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Rectal dilation, continued

When should I call the doctor?

Call your child's doctor if:

- You meet resistance and cannot pass the dilator.
- You are not able to comfort your child afterwards.
- There is bleeding after the dilations for more than 1 or 2 stools.
- Your child passes a spot of blood larger than a quarter.
- Your child has special healthcare needs that were not covered in your take home information or discharge instructions.

Also call if you have any questions or concerns about how your child looks or feels.

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.

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