

Bowel Management With a Balloon Catheter

Emptying the bowel using a balloon catheter allows more control over when and where a bowel movement will occur. It benefits people who have spina bifida, spinal cord injuries and other conditions that may interfere with the ability to have regular bowel movements.

The balloon catheter method works by stimulating the bowel and triggering a reflex bowel movement. This is done by inserting a catheter into the rectum and keeping it in place by inflating a small balloon (like a Foley catheter, only larger) and giving a saltwater enema. The liquid stretches the bowel, triggering a reflex bowel movement.

Using a Balloon Catheter

Your doctor or nurse will tell you how much salt and water to use based on your size. Usually, they recommend 10-15cc of lukewarm water (one-half ounce) per kilogram of body weight, with one-quarter to one teaspoon of table salt (depending on the amount of water).

1. Put the lukewarm water and salt in the enema bag and hang it five to six feet high.
2. Run the saltwater through the tubing. When the entire length of tubing is full of water, put the clamp on it.
3. Lubricate the tip of the catheter.
4. Sit on the toilet. Put the catheter into the rectum. Inflate the balloon with air to about the size of an egg. Pull gently on the catheter to make sure it's secure.
5. Open the clamp and let the water run quickly for about one to two minutes. If cramping occurs, reclamp briefly until the cramps stop, then reopen the clamp.
6. Deflate the balloon and take the catheter out.
7. Massage the abdomen vigorously, moving from right to left. This will help to move the stool along and out. A bowel movement should occur within a few minutes.

Wash the catheter with soap and water and let it air dry.

Successful Candidates

To use this method successfully, you should be able to insert the catheter and inflate the balloon. In addition, constipation should be under good control, and there should be no breaks in the rectal tissue.

Diet and Medications

Laxatives may be used to help thoroughly cleanse the bowel at first. Your doctor will determine how long laxatives should be used. In addition, extra fiber and fluids should be included in your diet to keep stools soft.

[Make An Appointment 651-290-8707](#)
This information is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care providers. If you have any questions, talk with your doctor or others on your health care team.

If you are a Gillette patient with urgent questions or concerns, please contact Telehealth Nursing at [651-229-3890](#).