

# Living with Irrigation

## Introduction

Does irrigation fit easily into your life, or are you trying to fit your life in between irrigations? The colostomate contemplating or trying irrigation is faced with so much advice, from so many sources, that reading it may easily take up more time than is available. In *Irrigation Notes* and *Improving Your Irrigation Technique* I have tried to offer a logical progression, and I have come to the conclusion that it could now be useful to try to put it all into perspective: to ensure that irrigation is your servant, not your master. I would stress, however, that my comments about a three (or four) day cycle are likely only to apply to colostomates who have a stoma in the descending colon, who therefore have the maximum length of colon remaining.

## When to Irrigate

Those starting to adopt irrigation are usually advised to be consistent, and always irrigate at the same time of day. This is a good principle to adopt initially, but it doesn't have to be followed too slavishly. Perhaps more important is at what time of day: when will it best fit in with your normal life? Almost everyone will be aware of the effect that stress has on the performance of the colon, so the fundamental recommendation should always be "when you can relax over it". You can even speed up the performance of an irrigation by consciously relaxing - try it for yourself. And conversely, don't irrigate if you have a train to catch!

## Before or After a Meal?

Why do we sit young children on the potty after a meal? It is to make use of the *gastro-colic reflex*, which is another way of saying that when you put food in at one end of the digestive system, the contents move along, and in children who do not yet have control of the anal sphincter, there is a tendency for faeces to emerge at the other end. My own trials have suggested that the same phenomenon can be used to improve the effectiveness of irrigation. If it suits your timetable, why not try it? It could be worth an additional half a day with no stoma output.

## How Long in Between Irrigations?

Following the previous remarks, I have put all the various factors together, and I have been irrigating after my evening meal. I am completely relaxed, because I have no other commitments, and in addition I am making use of the *gastro-colic reflex*. I have increased the quantity of water from 1¾ litres to 2 litres to obtain the maximum time, although I admit that I haven't bothered to check what benefit that actually yields, and I can now enjoy three days between irrigations, with the near certainty that the stoma cap will stay perfectly clean, except perhaps for a trace of mucus. For three days at a time I can simply forget that I have a stoma.

## What if my Usual Irrigation Time Proves Inconvenient?

But what if you normally irrigate after your evening meal, and you are invited out to dinner? You will most probably be late home, and you don't want to start irrigating then, so what do you do? Relax (as always), and leave it until the next day! It isn't the end of the world if something comes out, and you can wear a bag if you want, but more often than not I find that nothing comes out, and I stay clean for the additional day. After all, it may be another 24 hours, but if you are on a three day cycle it represents only an additional third of your normal interval between irrigations. When you irrigate after a longer interval, it will probably be necessary to introduce the water more gradually, because your colon has an additional day's contents, but that is the only difference.

## Postscript

Just stay relaxed, and remember that irrigation is your servant, not your master!