

Understanding Macrogol laxatives



A guide for parents and carers

What are Macrogols?

Macrogols are a group of medicines called osmotic laxatives. They are used to treat constipation and faecal impaction. There are several medicines in the group known as macrogols. They include Laxido, CosmoCol and Movicol. They all do the same thing but may taste different.

How do Macrogols work?

The active ingredient of the Macrogol is the water that you add to them. This water cannot be absorbed through the bowel wall. It stays in the bowel and breaks up any hard lumps of poo. The water in the Macrogol also keeps the poo soft as it moves through the bowel.



How are Macrogols taken?

Each sachet of Macrogol must be mixed with water as directed (usually at least 62.5mls per sachet for the children's strength and 125mls per sachet for adult strengths. The instructions will tell you how much water to use). The paediatric (children's) sachets are usually used in children under 12 years old. The adult sachets have twice as much powder in them as the paediatric ones and are usually only used for children who are at least 12 years old.

When you have added water to the macrogol powder, stir the mixture until it is clear. The macrogol may then be diluted further or added to any other drink e.g. squash, milk etc. It is important to mix it in this order. The water is the active ingredient. The macrogol needs to be added to the water on its own first or it will not work properly. The powder should never be sprinkled straight onto food or tipped straight into milk, juice, squash, or anything else. It will not work properly if you do this.

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What do I do if my child does not like the taste?

If your child does not like the taste of the macrogol, you can dilute it down with more water, or add a flavouring such as a sugar-free squash, but only after it has been mixed with the right amount of water. You could try buying a flavour of squash that your child has not had before and add that to the macrogol, after you have mixed it. Only let your child have that flavour of squash with the macrogol, so they do not notice if the macrogol makes it taste different.

Some children prefer to have the macrogol when it is cold. Try putting it into the fridge for an hour before giving it.

If your child will still not drink the macrogol then talk to their doctor or nurse. They may be able to prescribe a macrogol with a different flavour, or make other suggestions, or give your child a different type of laxative.

My child has thickened fluids – can I add thickener to the Macrogol?

Some children who have swallowing difficulties may have thickened fluids. There are two main types of thickeners. One is starch-based (usually modified maize or corn starch), the other is gum-based (including xanthan, guar, locust bean or carrageenan).

Macrogols must NOT be used with starch-based thickeners. This is because the macrogol and starch-based thickeners interact and result in a thin, watery liquid.

If your child is having thickened liquids, make sure that their doctor, nurse, or dietician knows this before you give them any Macrogol. If your child has a starch-based thickener, they may be able to change to a gum-based one.

What do I do if the Macrogol is not working well?

Macrogols are usually the only laxatives needed for many children with constipation. However, they do not work on their own for all children. Some children may need a stimulant laxative as well as the macrogol.

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The stimulant laxatives usually used in children are sodium picosulfate or senna. They help the muscles of the bowel wall work better, so the poo is moved through the bowel more quickly. This helps the poo stay soft and make it easier to pass.

If you are concerned that your child still has constipation or faecal impaction when they have been taking the macrogol as directed by your doctor or nurse, then ask them if they think your child may need another medicine as well as or instead of the Macrogol.

What is the correct time of day to give the Macrogol?

It does not matter what time of day the macrogol is given. Once the macrogol is mixed it can be kept in the fridge for up to twenty-four hours. When children are on large doses, such as during disimpaction, you may need to spread it throughout the day. However, the full daily dose must be given within twelve hours.

For children who are on smaller maintenance doses, some people chose to give it once a day, others give it twice a day. However, each daily dose should be given within twelve hours. It is often helpful to give the macrogol at the same time(s) each day. It does not matter what time you give it, so choose a time that is best for you. This will help you to remember to give it. Also, it will help some children to poo at the same time every day. This will allow them to have a regular toilet time every day and may reduce the likelihood of soiling (when poo goes in their pants). You should give the macrogol (and any other laxatives needed) when your child is with you if at possible. You should not need to send the laxatives to school for your child to have there unless your child's healthcare professional has advised you to do this.

How much Macrogol should my child have?

Your healthcare professional will advise you on the correct dose for your child. When giving Macrogols for chronic constipation the usual dose is often called the maintenance dose. Usual maintenance doses of Macrogol are shown in the chart below.

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Chart showing maintenance doses of Macrogol laxatives

Child's age	Recommended daily dose of Macrogol
1 - 12 months	½ - 1 sachets (paediatric)
1 - 6 years old	1 – 4 sachets (paediatric)
6 - 12 years old	2 – 4 sachets (paediatric)
12 – 18 years old	1 -2 sachets (adult)

If your child has faecal impaction, their healthcare professional may suggest that they have increasing doses of Macrogol. This is to ensure that all the old poo that has been stuck in their bowel has been cleared out. The usual doses for children with faecal impaction are:

Chart showing disimpaction doses of Macrogol laxatives

Child's age	Recommended Dose of Macrogol in sachets						
	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
1 – 12 months	½ - 1	½ - 1	½ - 1	½ - 1	½ - 1	½ - 1	½ - 1
1 – 5 years old	2	4	4	6	6	8	8
5 – 12 years old	4	6	8	10	12	12	12
12 – 18 years old (Adult sachets)	4	6	8	8	8	8	8

If you are not sure whether your child is impacted or not, then ask your healthcare professional. There is also more information in the Bladder & Bowel UK leaflet 'Understanding Constipation and Faecal Impaction'.

If your child has not fully disimpacted after two weeks on a disimpaction regime of Macrogol laxatives, they should normally be given a stimulant laxative as well. Children should not be taking a disimpaction dose of laxatives for more than two weeks unless advised to do so by their healthcare professional.

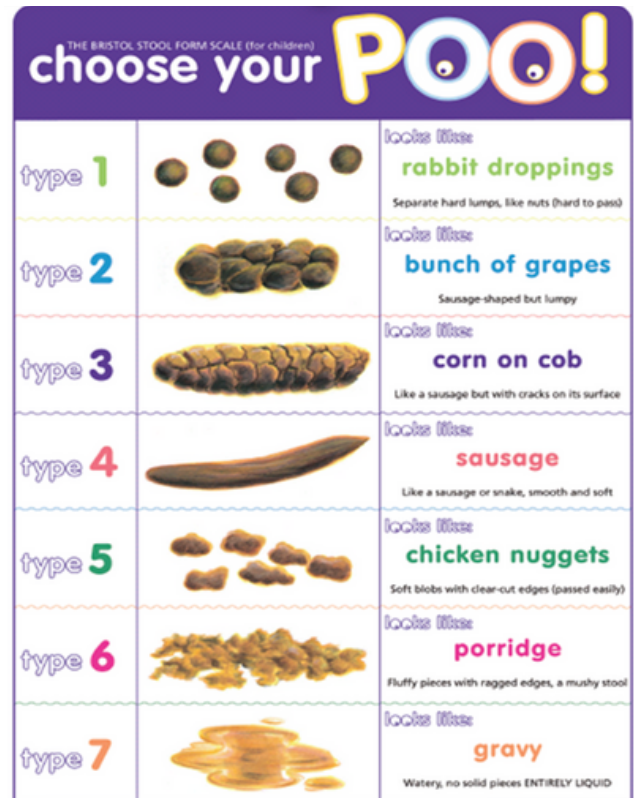
How do I reduce from a disimpaction dose to a maintenance dose?

When your child has fully disimpacted the Macrogols should be reduced to the maintenance dose. There are different ways of doing this. Your healthcare professional will advise you about how and when to reduce the disimpaction dose to the maintenance dose. Some children can reduce very quickly, others do so over a longer period of time.

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Your healthcare professional may suggest that you continue on the disimpaction dose of macrogol for one to three days after disimpacting, or they may suggest reducing the dose immediately.

You will know your child is disimpacted when they start to pass loose poos with no lumps in them (the poos may be any colour and there may be 'bits' in the poos from undigested foods, but disimpaction is complete when there are no lumps of poo present). Your healthcare professional may suggest that once your child is disimpacted, that you reduce the macrogol by one sachet every three days. They may suggest that you go straight down to half the disimpaction dose, or they may suggest that you go straight down to a maintenance dose as shown in the chart above. Be guided by your healthcare professional.



When you reduce the disimpaction dose of macrogol you are aiming for your child to start to pass type 4 – 5 poos (see picture) once to three times most days.

It may take a few days for your child's poos to go from a type 7 poo to a type 4 or 5 poo. This is normal. Expect the poo to stay loose for a few days and do not change the dose of macrogol for at least the first three or four days, if the poos stay loose.

If your child starts to do a type 1, 2 or 3 poo then they need to have some more laxative. You should ask your healthcare professional about increasing the dose.

Try to avoid changing the dose more than once every three to four days. It takes time for the macrogol to work and for your child's bowel to settle on the new dose.

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How long will my child need to take Macrogol for?

Each child is different and therefore the time that they need to take the Macrogol will vary. However, most children need to take a maintenance dose for many weeks or even months if they have had chronic constipation or faecal impaction. Some children need to take laxatives for a year or two and occasionally for longer than this. You should be guided by your child's healthcare professional.

Most children may be able to try a gradual reduction of their laxatives when they have had 3 – 6 months of passing soft stools once to three times most days with no problems. They may be able to try to reduce sooner than this if they start to pass large amounts of loose stools most days. Do not try to reduce the Macrogols while you are toilet training your child unless they are passing loose stools, or your healthcare professional tells you to.

How do I try to reduce the Macrogol laxatives?

You should only try to reduce the maintenance dose of Macrogols very slowly. Speak to your healthcare professional before you start to reduce the maintenance dose.

It is usually suggested that when your child has had no symptoms of constipation for about 3 – 6 months you could try to reduce their macrogol dose by half a to one sachet a day. e.g. if your child is having two sachets per day you could try giving them one or one and a half sachets per day. You should continue this dose for 4 – 6 weeks if they have no problems. You may then try to reduce by a further half or one sachet a day and leave them on the new, lower dose for a further 4 – 6 weeks. You may continue like this until your child has stopped taking the Macrogols.

If you are reducing your child's dose of Macrogol you should keep a note of how often they are doing a poo and what the poos are like. If your child's poos become small, they are hard, your child finds them difficult to pass, they start to strain, or to withhold the poo, or if they do not poo for more than 24 hours you should give them some extra laxative. If they need extra laxative more than once a week, you should put them back up to the dose at which they last had no problems and do not try to reduce the dose again for a further 4-6 weeks.

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Further advice

You should always read the leaflet that comes with any medicine that has been prescribed for your child.

Laxatives should always be prescribed by a healthcare professional for children under twelve years old. If you are concerned about your child (of any age) speak to their healthcare professional.

Always follow the advice given to you by your child's doctor or nurse. Talk to them if you have any concerns or questions.

You may also contact the **Bladder & Bowel UK** confidential helpline via **email** at bbuk@disabledliving.co.uk or by **telephone** on 0161 214 4591.

Related Information

There is more information about constipation and faecal impaction in the Bladder & Bowel UK leaflets at <https://www.bbuk.org.uk/bowel-resources/> These and all the other information leaflets about children's bladder and bowel issues are available at: <https://www.bbuk.org.uk/children-young-people/children-resources/>

For further information about Bladder & Bowel UK services and resources visit our website at www.bbuk.org.uk

There is a video about how to use Macrogol laxatives at www.thepoonurses.uk