

A Teen Guide to Macrogol Laxatives



Medicines that soften faeces (poo)

What are macrogols?

Macrogols are a group of medicines called osmotic laxatives. They are used to treat constipation and faecal impaction. CosmoCol, Laxido and Movicol are all macrogol laxatives. They all do the same thing but may taste different.

How do macrogols work?

The macrogols work by holding onto the water that you add to them. This water is the active ingredient. It cannot be absorbed through the bowel wall, so it stays in the bowel and breaks up any hard lumps and softens the poo.

How are macrogols taken?

Each sachet of macrogol must be mixed with water as directed, usually at least 62.5mls per sachet for the paediatric (children's) strength and 125mls per sachet for adult strengths. The instructions will tell you how much water to use. The paediatric 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 used for teenagers.

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 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 if I do not like the taste of the macrogl?

You can dilute the macrogl 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 it with a flavour of squash that you have not had before.

Some teenagers prefer to have the macrogl when it is cold. Try putting it into the fridge for an hour before you have it.

If you are still finding it difficult to take because of the taste, speak to your doctor or nurse. They may be able to prescribe a macrogl with a different flavour or give you a different type of laxative.

I have thickened fluids – can I add thickener to the macrogl?

Some teenagers who have swallowing difficulties 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).

Macrogl must NOT be used with starch-based thickeners.

This is because the macrogl and starch-based thickeners interact and result in a thin, watery liquid.

If you are having thickened liquids, make sure your doctor, nurse, or dietician knows this before you have any macrogl. If you have a starch-based thickener, you may be able to change to a gum-based one.

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

Macrogl are the only laxatives needed for many teenagers with constipation. However, they do not work on their own for everyone. You may need a **stimulant laxative** as well as the macrogl.

The stimulant laxatives usually used for teenagers 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 makes it easier to pass.

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If you feel that your constipation or faecal impaction are not getting better when you have been taking the macrogol as directed by your doctor or nurse, ask them if they think you need another medicine as well as or instead of the macrogol.

What is the correct time of day for teenagers to take macrogols?

It does not matter what time of day you have the macrogol. Once it has been mixed the macrogol can be kept in the fridge for up to twelve hours for the adult sachets and twenty-four hours for the paediatric sachets. However, the full daily dose for teenagers must be taken within six hours.

Teenagers who are on smaller doses, may choose to take the full dose in one go, or divide it and take it twice a day. However, each daily dose should be given within six hours. It is often helpful to give the macrogol at the same time(s) each day. It does not matter what time you take it, so choose a time that is best for you. This will help you to remember to have it.

How much macrogol should teenagers have?

Your healthcare professional should tell you how much to take. The amount taken each day for constipation is often called the maintenance dose. Usual maintenance doses of macrogol for teenagers is one to two adult strength sachets per day.

If you have faecal impaction, your healthcare professional may suggest increasing doses of macrogol. This is to ensure that all the old poo that has been stuck in your bowel has been cleared out. The usual doses for teenagers with faecal impaction are outlined in the table below:








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Chart showing disimpaction doses of macrogol laxatives

Age	Recommended dose of macrogol in sachets						
	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
5-12 years old (paediatric sachets)	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 you are impacted or not, then ask your healthcare professional.

Bristol Stool Chart

Type 1		Separate hard lumps, like nuts (hard to pass)
Type 2		Sausage-shaped but lumpy
Type 3		Like a sausage but with cracks on its surface
Type 4		Like a sausage or snake, smooth and soft
Type 5		Soft blobs with clear-cut edges (passed easily)
Type 6		Fluffy pieces with ragged edges, a mushy stool
Type 7		Watery, no solid pieces. Entirely Liquid

If you have not fully disimpacted after two weeks on a disimpaction regime of macrogol, your healthcare professional may suggest a stimulant laxative as well. Teenagers should not take a disimpaction dose of laxatives for more than two weeks unless advised to do so by their healthcare professional.

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

When you have fully disimpacted the macrogols should be reduced to the maintenance dose. You will know that you are fully disimpacted if you are passing liquid poos (type 7). These may be any colour and there may be 'bits' from undigested foods, but there should be no lumps of poo.

There are different ways of reducing the dose of macrogol when you are disimpacted. Your healthcare professional will advise you about how and when to reduce the disimpaction dose to the maintenance dose. Some teenagers can reduce very quickly, others do so over a longer period of time.

When you reduce the disimpaction dose of macrogol you are aiming to take enough laxative so that you are passing type 4 – 5 poos (see picture) once to three times most days. The amount of laxative needed for this is called the maintenance dose.

It may take a few days for your poos to go from a type 7 poo to a type 4 or 5 poo. This is normal. 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 bowel to settle on the new dose.

If you start to do type 1, 2 or 3 poos then you may need to have some more laxative. You should ask your healthcare professional about increasing the dose.

How long do teenagers need to take macrogol for?

Each teenager is different and therefore the time that they need to take the macrogol will vary.

Most teenagers are 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. You may be able to try to reduce sooner than this if you start to pass large amounts of loose stools most days. Some teenagers will need them for more than six months. Always follow your healthcare professional's advice.

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Further advice

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

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

There is more information about constipation and faecal impaction in the Bladder & Bowel UK [Teenager information library](#).

Further information

Find more information about bladder and bowel health in our information library at www.bbuk.org.uk. You can also contact the [**Bladder & Bowel UK confidential helpline**](#) (0161 214 4591).

For further advice on bladder and bowel problems speak to your GP or other healthcare professional.