

Discussing Macrogol Laxatives

A guide for adults and carers

What are Macrogols?

Macrogols are a group of medicines called osmotic laxatives. They are used to treat constipation and faecal impaction. Constipation is a symptom-based disorder, which describes defecation that is unsatisfactory because of infrequent stools, difficulty passing stools, or the sensation of incomplete emptying. Faecal impaction is a condition that may develop if constipation has progressed to the point where there is so much faeces in the bowel that the normal movements of the bowel wall muscles are not able to clear it.

There are several medicines in the group known as macrogols. They are commonly known by their brand names, with examples being Laxido, CosmoCol and Movicol. They all do the same thing but may taste different.

Macrogols come in different strengths. There are the 'full strength' adult sachets, half strength, and paediatric sachets. The half strength and paediatric both have half the amount of active ingredient as the adult strength. Macrogols are also available as oral solution (a liquid).

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 combines with the faeces to break up any hard lumps and soften the faeces.

Only macrogol 'ready to take oral solution' comes with the water already added. All other macrogols come as a powder or a concentrated liquid and must have water added to them, before being taken.

How are Macrogols taken?

Each sachet of Macrogol and each dose of concentrated liquid Macrogol must be mixed with water as directed. This is usually at least 125mls per sachet for adult strengths, 100mls for each 25mls of oral liquid and 62.5mls per sachet for the half and children's strengths. The instructions will tell you how much water to use.

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 from the sachets 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.

Can Macrogols be thickened or added to thickened fluids?

Some people who have swallowing difficulties may be advised to 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 and 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 you are having thickened liquids, make sure that your doctor, pharmacist or dietician knows this before you take any Macrogol. If you are using a starch-based thickener, you may be able to change to a gum-based one.

What if I do not like the taste?

If you do not like the taste of the Macrogol, it may be diluted down further by adding extra water. You could also try adding a flavouring such as a sugar-free squash, but only after it has been mixed with the right amount of water. Some people prefer the flavour when the Macrogol is cold. Try putting it into the fridge for an hour before taking it.

The Macrogols come in different flavours. Ask your pharmacist or doctor if you could try a different Macrogol with a different flavour, or if a different type of laxative may be an option for you.

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

Macrogols are the only laxatives needed for many people with constipation. However, they do not work for everybody. Some people may need a stimulant laxative as well as the Macrogol. The stimulant laxatives help the muscles of the bowel wall work more effectively, so the faeces are moved through the bowel more quickly. This helps the faeces stay soft and make it easier to pass.

If you have had a recent change in bowel habit, or if the Macrogols are not working well for you, then talk to your healthcare professional (GP, nurse or pharmacist) as they may be able to suggest another laxative that would be suitable for you. They may also be able to refer you for more specialist help, if they think that is needed.

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

It does not matter what time of day the Macrogol is taken. Once the Macrogol is mixed it can be kept in the fridge for up to twelve hours. However, the full daily dose must be taken within six hours.

It may be helpful to take the Macrogol at the same time(s) each day, at a time that is best for you. This will help you to remember to have it. Also, some people find that taking it this way helps them to open their bowels at the same time each day, which can be more convenient.

How much Macrogol should I have?

Your healthcare professional will advise you on the correct dose for you. When taking Macrogols for chronic constipation the usual dose is often called the maintenance dose. Usual maintenance doses of Macrogol full strength sachets for adults are 1 – 3 sachets per day for up to two weeks. After two weeks the usual maintenance dose is 1 – 2 sachets per day of the full-strength sachets.

If you have the half strength sachets the usual dose is 2 – 6 sachets per day for up to two weeks and then 2 – 4 sachets per day of the half strength. For Movicol liquid the usual maintenance dose is 25mls once to three times a day for up to two weeks and then 25mls once or twice a day.

If you have faecal impaction, your healthcare professional may advise increasing doses of Macrogol. This is to ensure that any faeces that have been held in the bowel is cleared out. They will advise you on how much of the macrogol to take, how to increase the dose and when to reduce it again.

Further advice

You should always read the leaflet that comes with any medicine that you take.

Always follow the advice given to you by your doctor, nurse or pharmacist, including about the correct dose for you. Talk to them if you have any concerns or questions.

You may also contact the **Bladder & Bowel UK confidential helpline** via the web form at <https://www.bbuk.org.uk/helpline-enquiries/> or **Telephone: 0161 214 4591**

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

This booklet can be freely downloaded and printed as a whole. However, no part of this document may be copied or distributed without the authors' permission.

Copyright © Bladder & Bowel UK
Disabled Living 2021
Registered Charity No 224742

