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Glycerol suppositories for constipation

Glycerol suppositories should only be used to provide short-term relief from constipation.

If you are still constipated after three days, you should see your doctor.

Eating a healthy diet, drinking plenty of water and getting regular gentle exercise can all help maintain good bowel function.

About glycerol suppositories

Type of medicine	Laxative
Used for	Constipation
Also called	Glycerin suppositories
Available as	Suppositories

Constipation can be caused by a poor diet, not drinking enough water and not going to the toilet as soon as you feel you need to. Pregnancy, a lack of exercise or movement (such as being ill in bed) and some medicines, including some painkillers, can also cause constipation. However, many people take laxatives when they do not need to because they believe that they are constipated unless they go to the toilet every day. This is not the case. A useful definition of constipation is going to the toilet less frequently than is normal for you, and passing hard stools when you do go.

Glycerol suppositories are used to treat constipation. They can be bought without a prescription at pharmacies and other retail outlets. Glycerol is a mild irritant. It works by encouraging muscles around your back passage to contract. This helps you to go to the toilet.

Before using glycerol suppositories

To make sure this is the right treatment for you, ask for advice from a doctor or pharmacist before you start using glycerol suppositories if any of the following apply to you:

- If you are pregnant, trying for a baby or breastfeeding. This is because, while you are expecting or feeding a baby, you should only use medicines on the recommendation of a doctor.
- If they are for a child. This is because laxatives should only be given to children on the advice of a doctor or healthcare professional.
- If you have severe pain in your tummy (abdomen) or feel sick.
- If you are taking any other medicines. This includes any medicines you are taking which are available to buy without a prescription, as well as herbal and complementary medicines.
- If you have ever had an allergic reaction to a medicine.

How to use glycerol suppositories

- Before you start using the suppositories, read the manufacturer's printed information leaflet from inside your pack.
- Use one suppository when needed. It will take about 20 minutes to work.

How to use a suppository

1. Remove the suppository from the wrapping.
2. Most people find it helps to insert the suppository if it is moistened with a little tap water first.
3. Using a finger, gently push the suppository into your back passage (rectum) as far as is comfortable.

4. Remain still for a little while to help hold the suppository in place. It will start to work in about 20 minutes or so.
5. Wash your hands afterwards.

Getting the most from your treatment

- Unless you have been told otherwise by your doctor, laxatives like glycerol suppositories should only be used to provide short-term relief from constipation. If you are still constipated after using these suppositories for three days, you should see your doctor.
- A healthy diet containing fibre (wholegrain breads and cereals, bran, fruit and green leafy vegetables) with several glasses of water each day and daily exercise are important in maintaining healthy bowel function.
- You can read more about how to prevent or treat constipation in the separate condition leaflets called [Constipation](#) (for adults) and [Constipation in Children](#).

Can glycerol suppositories cause problems?

Glycerol suppositories do not usually lead to side-effects, but on occasions they may irritate or cause stomach cramp. If you experience any other symptoms, speak with a doctor or pharmacist for further advice.

How to store glycerol suppositories

- Keep all medicines out of the reach and sight of children.
- Store in a cool, dry place, away from direct heat and light.

Important information about all medicines

Suppositories are for rectal use only. If someone swallows any, go to the accident and emergency department of your local hospital. Take the container with you, even if it is empty.

If you are having an operation or any dental treatment, tell the person carrying out the treatment which medicines you are taking.

If you buy any medicines, check with a pharmacist that they are suitable to take with your other medicines.

Never keep out-of-date or unwanted medicines. Take them to your local pharmacy which will dispose of them for you.

If you have any questions about this medicine ask your pharmacist.

If you experience side effects, you can report them online through the [Yellow Card website](#).

Further reading

- [Manufacturer's PIL, Glycerol Suppositories 4 g](#); Martindale Pharma, an Ethypharm Group Company, The electronic Medicines Compendium. Dated July 2022.
- [Medicines Complete BNF 87th Edition](#); British Medical Association and Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, London.

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