Distal Loop Washout

What is it?

A distal loop washout is a procedure carried out to clean the lower part of the bowel, i.e. the bowel from the stoma down to the bottom (or where the bottom should be in children with Anorectal Anomalies (ARM).

Surgeons may ask for this to be done as a once-only procedure or on a regular basis. It is done:

1. After an operation to form a stoma and started before the child is discharged. It is done in an attempt to clear the lower part of the bowel of meconium or old stool.
2. Before surgery to perform an anoplasty or a pull-through procedure to ensure the bowel is clean for surgery.
3. Or in cases where your baby/child is producing a lot of mucus in the lower bowel which is being passed through the bottom.

Procedure for Babies

A small (rectal) catheter will be passed into the part of the stoma which leads to the bottom. Small amounts of warm saline will then be run through the tube into the bowel. If the baby has an opening in the bottom, the saline may exit the body along with any stool or mucus. If the baby has an ARM, the saline, stool and mucus will come up and out of the stoma.

The nurse will continue to run small amounts of saline in until no further stool or mucus is present.

Procedure for Older Children

With older children the procedure is easier and quicker if they sit on the toilet. A (rectal) catheter will be passed into the part of the stoma leading to the bottom. Warm saline is run into the tube, this can then pass into the toilet with any stool or mucus. The nurse will continue to run saline in until it runs clear from the bottom.

The bowel has no sensory nerves and therefore this procedure is not a painful one, however the child may be frightened of a tube being placed into the stoma. Explanation of the procedure should be given to the child in a way he/she can understand. Usually, when the procedure is done more than once, the child's fear diminishes.

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