Rectal administration of paraldehyde

Information for patients, families and carers
Pharmacy
Introduction

This leaflet provides information to patients and their relatives or carers about rectal administration of paraldehyde.

It includes information on why paraldehyde is used, dosing, how it works, how to administer the rectal solution and other important information.

What is rectal paraldehyde used for?

Paraldehyde is administered rectally to stop seizures that occur in patients who have been diagnosed with epilepsy. The paraldehyde enema comes ready diluted in olive oil.

What is the usual dose?

The dose is usually based on weight and so is different for every patient.

Each patient should be given a rescue guideline, which contains the individual volume of rectal paraldehyde needed.

How does it work?

When someone is having a seizure there is uncontrolled electrical activity in the brain. Paraldehyde helps to control this electrical activity and can be used to stop prolonged or clusters of seizures when they happen.
How to administer rectal paraldehyde

- Wash hands and wear disposable gloves (latex free if allergic to latex).
- Attach the plastic mixing needle/tube to a 20ml syringe. Note: paraldehyde melts plastic syringes but a plastic syringe can be used if the contact time is less than 10 minutes.
- Draw up the required amount of paraldehyde and olive oil enema as per the rescue guideline.
- Place the adult or child on their left side if possible to prevent the backflow of liquid from the syringe.
- Lubricate the end of the plastic tube with KY jelly (or equivalent).
- Maintaining the person's dignity, gently lift the right buttock and using discretion insert the rectal nozzle (end of the mixing needle) a few centimetres (at least a thumb's length into the rectum).
- Gently administer the paraldehyde into the rectum by pressing the syringe. If there is any immediate leakage you may need to insert the mixing needle a little further.
- Gently hold the person's buttocks together for a few minutes to prevent leakage of the medicine and give it time to be absorbed.
- Ensure the person is in the recovery position.
- Observe the person for signs of the seizure ending.
- Remove the mixing needle from the rectum and dispose of the mixing needle and the syringe safely.
- Ensure the room is well ventilated.
What else do I need to know about?

- Store the bottle in a dry cool place, below 25°C (never in a fridge) away from direct light.
- Only use the enema if the seal is intact.
- Use immediately once the paraldehyde and olive oil enema has been drawn up into a plastic syringe.
- Always check that the paraldehyde in olive oil enema is in date.
- Keep plenty of stock of the enemas, syringes and mixing tubes.
- Always carry a paraldehyde pack just in case it is needed.
- Use in a ventilated area if possible - open the windows after use.

Do not use the solution if it is brownish in colour or if it smells of vinegar.

What should I do if it does not work?

If the seizure does not stop, call an ambulance.

Do not repeat a dose of paraldehyde unless your rescue guideline specifically permits this.

Are there any side effects?

- The most common side effect is local soreness or skin irritation around the back passage.
- Drowsiness can be expected and some people may have a slight lowering of their blood pressure. This means they may be a little unsteady, faint or weak for a short period afterwards. It is a good idea to supervise the person until they have returned to their usual abilities.
- Some people may have an unusual smell to their breath after the medication administration but this will disappear.
- Rashes and headache have also been reported.
Disposal

Used equipment should be disposed of in an appropriate clinical waste box. This would preferably be a sharps box which should also be available on prescription. Alternatively, you could use a reinforced plastic bottle such as an old bleach bottle until you are able to dispose of the equipment. Ask your local pharmacy, GP surgery or local council what facilities are available for disposal.

What should I do in case of spillage or contamination, eg on skin?

- For skin contact - wash with copious amounts of water.
- For spillage - wear gloves and clean with absorbent material and copious amounts of water. Dispose of the waste in the sharp’s bin.
- Ensure the area is well ventilated.

Additional information

The information in this leaflet is not intended to replace your doctor’s advice. If you require more information or have any questions you could speak to your doctor or your epilepsy nurse.

Epilepsy nurses

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Contacts

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