

medication. Because suppositories soften when warm to release the medication, they must be kept cool before administration. Be sure to insert a rectal suppository immediately after opening it or it will melt in your hand. **Enemas** are liquids administered through the rectum to soften stool, cleanse bowels, or deliver medication. Enemas are rarely given in the ambulatory setting, but many patients must administer them at home as a preparation for bowel procedures or surgery or as treatment for constipation. For these reasons, patients must be taught how to use them. To administer a rectal suppository or enema, follow the instructions in Procedure Box 9-4.

Other medications that may be given rectally include rectal suspensions (e.g., mesalamine, used as a gastrointestinal anti-inflammatory medication) and ointments (e.g., Preparation H, used to treat hemorrhoids). Both types of medications are usually administered through an applicator tip placed into the rectum.



### CRITICAL THINKING

Why is the gastrointestinal a popular route for taking medication?

#### Procedure Box 9-4 Rectal Administration

This procedure can be used for a rectal suppository or an enema.

- Observe the seven “rights” of medication administration.
- Read the medication order, and compare it with the medication container.
- Wash hands.
- Compare the medication order with the container a second time. Check the expiration date.
- Identify the patient, and explain what you will be doing.
- Compare the order and the container a third time.
- Have the patient remove his or her underwear.
- Assist the patient to lie on the left side.
- Place waterproof sheeting under the patient.
- Drape the patient for privacy.
- Put on gloves.
- Open the suppository wrapping, or remove the cover from the enema bottle.
- Gently separate the patient’s buttocks.
- Apply a water-based lubricant to the tip of the enema bottle or suppository.
- Insert the suppository with one finger into the patient’s rectum, or insert the tip of the enema bottle past the anal sphincter, and squeeze contents slowly into the rectum.
- Remove your finger or the tip of bottle from the patient’s rectum.
- Assess the patient.
- Ask the patient to lie still for approximately 30 minutes.
- Clean the patient and the patient’s area.
- Remove gloves.
- Wash hands.
- Document medication dosage and the patient’s response.

*Example:*

04/5/2013 3:30 p.m.: temperature 103.2 rectal. grV Tylenol PR. Patient tolerated procedure well.

CJ Watkins RN, MSN

04/5/2013 4:00 p.m.: temperature now 100.2 rectal. CJ Watkins RN, MSN