

Four Ways To Unclog a Toilet Bowl

College and university took up six years of my life, but I spent eight years changing diapers. We only have two children, and my daughter was toilet-trained by the age of three, and with my son being only a year and a half younger, I figured I'd get off easy with a 4.5 year sentence. He turned out to be autistic, however, so it took 4 extra years. But let bygones be bygones I thought. It was time to close that book, and forget the unpleasanties, until I realized he had a special talent for clogging toilet bowls.

Look at the green outline that I drew on the borrowed diagram, and can you see why you can't simply go in there and pull out the obstacle with your fingers, even if you had the guts to do so. The first thing most people will recommend is several tries with the plunger. When you push on the plunger so as to completely flatten its rubber end, you force most of the air out. When you let it gain its form again, a partial vacuum will result, which makes the atmospheric pressure of the trapped air much more effective in pushing up on the remaining water and obstacle. This method works for many clogs caused by toilet paper. Sometimes if you allow a bit of time in between attempts, it gives the paper a chance to partially dissolve.

A couple of times I have had success with combining this technique with baking soda and vinegar, which generated carbon dioxide gas. But I have not really tested it out in a controlled experiment, so I don't know if in those cases the plunger on its own would have sufficed on the second or third attempt.

On one occasion, my son flushed the plastic toilet paper holder. This caused a partial clog, which was still annoying because we needed several flushes to eliminate our wastes. I went in there with a long flexible metal rod, which can bend and follow that meandering route, but the long, curved, slippery plastic surface of the obstacle kept it imbedded. I had to remove the bowl and carry it onto the garage. The roller was just at the edge of the trap, but in spite of its spring, it could not contract enough to be yanked out. But the spring gave me an idea. With a copper wire I made a hook. I smashed into the plastic with a screwdriver, hooked the wire into the spring, and fished it out with force.

Last night's bout kept me up until half past midnight. After the flood, I shut the water valve, cleaned the mess, put my kids to bed and first took a power nap. When I awoke, I tried the plunger and plumber's coil, but a magnet was not the only thing he had

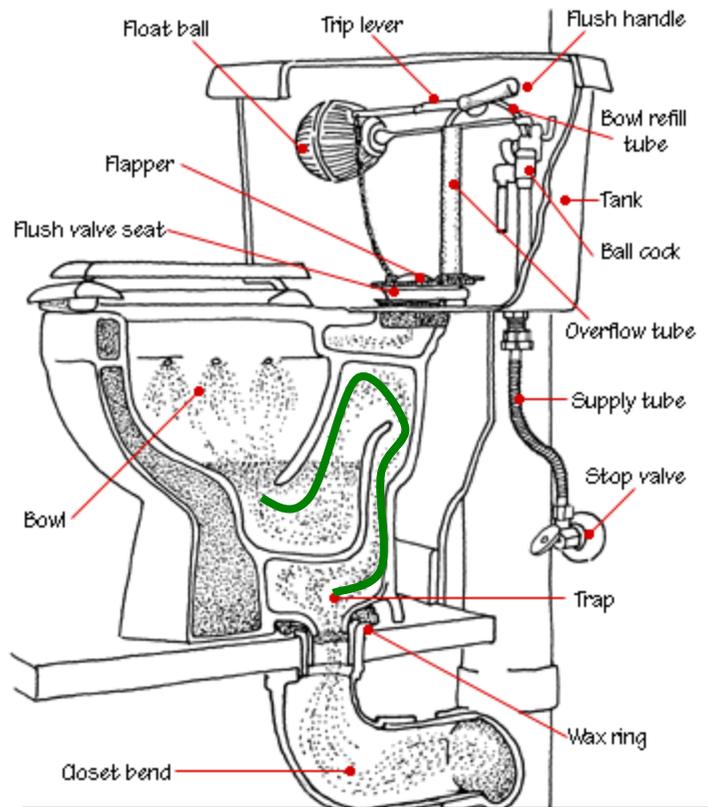


Diagram from: <http://www.hometips.com/hyhw/plumbing/88toilet.html>

thrown in there. After removing the bowl, my wife and I found a cluster of paper at the edge. We tried to force water through the bowl again, but an hour later, the clog persisted. I tried a metal hook, and even a lasso, but the mysterious object kept blocking the passage. Finally after my wife gave up, my obsessive mind drove me to carry the bowl and tank down two flights of stairs and into the garage. I stuck the nozzle of the water hose into the base of the bowl, which I had turned sideways onto an old carpet, and I turned on the water full-blast. At first, it deflected right back. I tried from the other end, still without success. But when I placed the bowl upright on a couple of two-by-fours, the water finally rushed out of the opposite end. I filled the tank, and the toilet flushed like John (Thomas) Crapper intended. The obstacle is either somewhere under our van, or the pressure of the water may have just dissolved another hidden cluster of paper.

Once I removed the bowl, I had to replace the wax ring at the base of the bowl. The ring creates a good seal and allows atmospheric pressure to work more efficiently for you, as it will push in one direction only. To complicate life, the rings come in different sizes, so I always make sure to get the thinner variety.

I sincerely hope that I do not have to update this essay for the third time...

Unfortunately, this is three months later, and we had another major blockage, one that left about 3 cm of water on the floor of our so-called powder room. On the positive side, it was fixed solely with the plunger, and no water seeped through to the basement. The latter was not a fluke, however. After the last disaster, I siliconed every possible escape route for water: all edges of the ceramic, the contact points between the bowl and the floor. So all we had to do was get towels to soak up the pond, and mop up with bleach, soap and water.