

PharmaNotes

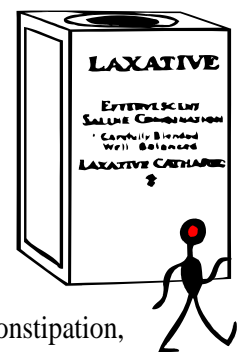
Summer 2006

By Hedva Barenholtz Levy, PharmD, BCPS, Director, HbL PharmaConsulting

What Are Laxatives?

Laxatives are medications that are used to prevent or treat constipation. Consumers spend more than \$734 million dollars a year on laxatives. Constipation is estimated to occur in up to 40% of patient 65 years and older living in the community and is a common concern in older adults. Constipation is defined as having 2 or more of the following symptoms at least 25% of the time:

- Straining to have a stool,
- Passage of lumpy or hard stools,
- Sensation of incomplete evacuation,
- Sensation of blockage,
- Requiring manual maneuvers to facilitate defecation, or
- Fewer than 3 bowel movements per week



Your doctor or pharmacist can help you decide which laxative is the best for you. Current medications and health conditions may influence the choice of treatment.

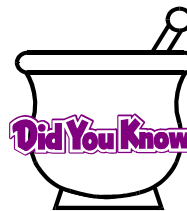
Unfortunately, many people use laxatives for what they believe is constipation, for example, if they do not have at least one bowel movement a day. In reality, being “regular” can range from having a couple bowel movements daily to a couple bowel movements weekly. When used properly, laxatives help the passage and elimination of fecal matter from the colon and rectum.

What causes constipation? Constipation can be caused or worsened by certain medical conditions, like hypothyroidism, diabetes, and depression; some medications (see table 1); and lifestyle characteristics. Lifestyle characteristics include not eating enough fiber, not drinking enough water, not getting enough physical activity, and avoiding or not being

(Continued on page 2)

Caregiver Memory Kits

Life is full of celebrating holidays and special occasions, socializing with friends, and enjoying favorite hobbies. Patients coping with dementia or Alzheimer’s disease have difficulty performing these former activities of ordinary living. Finding activities that a person with dementia can do can be a



challenge.

Familiar objects in

Caregiver Memory Kits by Life Memories Renewed generate interest and stimulate reflections of happy times and help to recapture enjoyable aspects of everyday lives. The Kits can be used by family members or caregivers with the patient with dementia individually or in a group setting. To learn more,

contact Karen Bono at 314-368-7969 or P.O. Box 181, Chesterfield, MO 63017.

Table 1. Examples of medications that cause or contribute to

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| amitriptyline | iron supplements |
| antacids with calcium or aluminum | oxybutynin |
| diltiazem (Cardizem, Tiazac) | pain medicines like codeine or morphine |
| diphenhydramine | simvastatin (Zocor) |
| fluoxetine (Prozac) | verapamil (Calan) |

(Continued from page 1)

aware of the urge to empty the bowel. When constipation lasts for more than 3 weeks or when accompanied by pain or bleeding, a physician needs to be consulted.

How can you prevent constipation? Patients should drink 4 to 10 glasses of water a day, especially when increasing the amount of fiber in their diet. Standard recommendations for fiber suggest 20 to 30 grams of fiber a day. Good sources of fiber include fresh fruits and vegetables, cereals, bran products, dried fruits, and beans. It is recommended to increase the amount of fiber in your diet gradually to avoid side effects like bloating and gas. Walking and other types of physical activity increase muscle tone and improve bowel movements. Do not rush your time on the toilet and do not strain. Try sitting on the toilet after meals, especially breakfast.

What types of laxatives are there to choose from? There are 5 different types of laxatives that are available without a prescription. This alone can be a source of confusion. In addition, other laxatives are available only with a prescription. The several types of laxatives are described in Table 2. Because of the many choices, be sure to talk with your health care professional to know which product to try and how you should take it.

How do you use laxatives safely? Your doctor or pharmacist can help you decide which laxative is the best for you. Current medications and health conditions may influence the choice of treatment. For self-treatment of constipation, laxatives in general should be used for no longer than one week because of the potential for adverse effects. Overuse sometimes can worsen the problem. If constipation has lasted for 3 weeks or if you have pain or bleeding associated with constipation, talk to your doctor.

Are There Other Issues? When constipation is a side effect of a medication, it is recommended to use the strategies described above to prevent constipation. When those are not enough, and if the medication cannot be stopped or changed, a laxative can be prescribed.

Contact Dr. Hedva Levy at HbL PharmaConsulting if you have additional questions on this topic

TWO NEW DRUGS for Parkinson's Disease are in the news. **Rasagiline (Azilect®)** was approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in May 2006. It is in the same drug class as selegiline, but rasagiline has a lower risk of side effects. It works by inhibiting the MAO-B enzyme, which breaks down dopamine in the brain (there also is an MAO-A enzyme). Thus, both selegiline and rasagiline work to increase the amount of dopamine available in the brain. Rasagiline is given once daily and can be used alone in early stages of Parkinson's or combined with levodopa/carbidopa in later stages.



Zelapar® is a new formulation of selegiline that dissolves on the tongue. It was approved by the FDA in June 2006. The benefit is that it works more quickly and decreases the risk of unwanted side effects compared to the original selegiline tablet. The orally disintegrating formulation is designed to reduce "off" time when motor symptoms can be problematic and increase "on" time throughout the day. Side effects are more common in older adults and include dizziness, high blood pressure, and drowsiness, for

Parkinson's Drugs
in the News

| Type | Examples | How it works | Onset | Comments |
|------------------------------|---|---|----------------|---|
| Fiber or Bulk-forming | methylcellulose, polycarbophil, Citrucel®, Metamucil® | Increases bulk and water in the stool | 1 to 3 days | Take with plenty of fluids; available without prescription |
| Stool softeners | docusate, Colace® | Increases moisture in stool to soften it | 1 to 3 days | Often used on a daily basis to prevent straining; available without prescription |
| Lubricant | mineral oil | Softens and coats fecal contents | 6 to 8 hours | Not routinely recommended; avoid in older adults; do not use at bedtime; available without prescription |
| Osmotic or Saline | magnesium citrate, milk of magnesia, lactulose, sorbitol, PEG 3350 (MiraLax®) | Pulls water in to intestine to increase pressure and stimulate movement | 0.5 to 3 hours | Limit use to 1 week. Lactulose, sorbitol, PEG 3350 by prescription only |
| Stimulant | Senna, bisacodyl (Dulcolax®) | Causes local irritation of intestines to stimulate activity | 6 to 10 hours | May cause cramping, dehydration; limit use to 1 week; available without prescription |
| Other | Tegaserod (Zelnorm®) | Acts on receptors in intestines to stimulate activity | Not available | Approved only for use in patients younger than 65 years old; prescription only |
| | Lubiprostone (Amitiza®) | Increases the amount of fluid in the intestines | Not available | Nausea is common side effect, take with food; prescription only |

More About Fiber

Fiber is part of the vegetable matter that does not get digested in our bodies. Fiber increases bulk in the stool, retains water, and speeds up the movement of the digestive tract. It is important to drink plenty of fluids along with increased fiber, and be sure to increase your daily intake of fiber gradually.

Good sources of fiber include whole grain breads, fruits, and vegetables.

Increases in fiber can cause gas and abdominal discomfort during the first few weeks. Adding fiber to one's diet will not be helpful for everyone, so talk with your health care professional. For a list of fiber content in foods, contact HbL PharmaConsulting.



About HbL PharmaConsulting

HbL PharmaConsulting offers professional consultations to patients who take multiple medications. The goals of each consult include preventing and correcting medication-related problems, improving patient quality of life, and identifying ways to reduce drug costs. For more information, contact Dr. Levy.

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