

REVIEW ARTICLE

CONSTIPATION: A PHARMACIST'S VIEW AND ROLE

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Constipation is a common and widely seen condition in adults as well as children. The goal of managing constipation is reducing complications associated with it so as to improve the patient's quality of life. The pharmacist can play a vital role while reviewing the patient's medications and herbal supplements to rule out secondary causes of constipation. The pharmacist also plays an integral role in choosing appropriate therapies for primary constipation and monitoring the efficacy and toxicity of these agents. Pharmacists ensure that the patients are being very convincingly counseled and recommended to implement lifestyle modifications including increased fiber intake, hydration, and increased physical activity. This article briefly compiles some necessary information regarding causes and remedies of constipation.

Key words: Constipation, Herbal supplements, Hemorrhoids, Laxatives.

INTRODUCTION

Constipation means different things to different people. For many people, it simply means infrequent stools. For others, however, constipation means hard stools, difficulty in passing stools (straining), or a sense of incomplete emptying after a bowel movement. The number of bowel movements generally decreases with age. 95 percent of adults have bowel movements between 3 to 21 times per week, and this would be considered normal. The most common pattern is one bowel movement a day, but this pattern is seen in less than 50% of people (Sukumar and Shashirekha, 2014). Moreover, most people are irregular and do not have bowel movements every day or the same number of bowel movements each day. Medically speaking constipation usually is defined as fewer than three bowel movements per week. The cycle of constipation is shown in **Figure 1**.

Severe constipation is defined as less than one bowel movement per week. Going without a bowel movement for two or three days does not cause physical discomfort, only mental distress for some people (Goodman *et al* 2001). Contrary

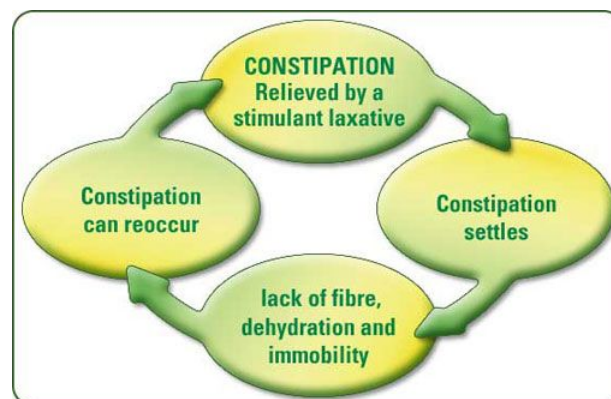


Fig. 1. The cycle of constipation

to popular belief, there is no evidence that "toxins" accumulate when bowel movements are infrequent. It is important to distinguish between acute (recent onset) constipation from chronic (long duration) constipation. Acute constipation requires urgent assessment because a serious medical illness may be the underlying cause (*e.g.* tumors of the colon). Constipation also requires an immediate assessment if it is accompanied by worrisome symptoms such as rectal bleeding, abdominal pain and cramps, nausea and vomiting and