

50/84 NUTRITIONALLY SPEAKING

Foods that constipate

by George Meinig, DDS

Dear Dr. Meinig: Would appreciate you listing common foods that are: (1) Constipating (2) Laxative - such lists seem hard to find. M

Dear M.: You are so right. I have never seen such a list. Dr. Harold Hawkins' "Applied Nutrition" comes close, but even there the information is scattered among sections dealing with the problems of constipation, diarrhea and intestinal rates. Most textbooks and articles concentrate on treatment of these conditions rather than the foods that can be causative.

While there are foods that tend to cause constipation or diarrhea, there are several other factors with equal or even more influence on the situation. Before considering specific foods, some background information on these two conditions will be helpful. Inasmuch as constipation is the more prevalent, let us first ask why this is called, "the disease of civilization." Here is a list of contributing habits and conditions characteristic of our "civilization":

- (1) Low intake of residue (fibrous) foods.
- (2) High intake of refined foods and sweets.
- (3) Sedentary lifestyle - little or no exercise.
- (4) Habitual tension - stress.
- (5) Not heeding the urge for evacuation (bowel movement).
- (6) Frequent use of laxatives.
- (7) Too little water consumed each day.
- (8) Spastic colon - alkaline stools.
- (9) Flaccid atonic colon - acid stools.
- (10) Deficiency of pancreatic digestive enzymes.
- (11) Deficiency of bile from the liver.
- (12) Vitamin B deficiency.
- (13) Excessive intake of vitamin B.
- (14) Constipation causes hemorrhoids and hemorrhoids can cause further constipation.

EVEN THOUGH that is a long list, I dare say most of you could make other suggestions from your own experience. What are some of the foods that are constipating or indirectly contribute to constipation? They are: Refined grains (wheat, rice, rye), lean meats, sugar, boiled milk, soups, cereals, egg white,

gelatin, blackberries, and calcium supplements.

Refined grains are probably the most common cause of constipation. Most people feel that soft, well-cooked foods should result in soft stools. Just the opposite is what happens. Hard, fibrous foods are the ones that normalize our excretions. All of the recent interest in complex carbohydrates has come from the research work of the famous English physician, Dr. Dennis Burkett. It all started when an English hospital had 70 patients scheduled for surgery for diverticulitis, but because of an especially large case load, postponement of the operations became necessary. Diverticulitis had always been treated with a bland, highly refined, non-fibrous diet. However, someone suggested these 70 patients be given some bran every day. Lo and behold! By the time the hospital operating rooms were available, 62 of these patients were free of symptoms!

This led Dr. Burkett to conduct detailed studies of this problem in England, India and Africa. His funny and fascinating lectures and articles have sparked the switch of medical prescriptions away from the refined grains, to the complex carbohydrates. His dietary rule, in brief: Hard foods in--soft out; soft foods in--hard out."

TREATMENT OF constipation should certainly consider possible food causes, but it cannot ignore diseases or other conditions that may be contributory. One of the most important and most often overlooked is the need for digestive enzymes. *Lactobacillus acidophilus* is also an aid, when treating constipation, as are magnesium products. Mineral oil should never be used as a laxative, as it causes a loss of carotené and the fat soluble vitamins A, D, E and K.

Foods laxative in nature are fruits, vegetables, and 100 percent whole grains. A couple of raw vegetables salads a day can perform miracles for many people. I assumed your question was not meant to ask what foods specifically have a laxative action, but what ones cause normal stool formation and evacuation. These often become confused in our thinking.

For those who suffer from diarrhea, treatment by diet control should increase the intake of protein (meat, fish and eggs); reduce or stop raw fruits and vegetables; boil milk, eat blackberries (they make calcium hard to digest), and take vitamin B complex, niacinamide, and B6. Heavy milk drinkers should stop milk, as its high calcium content may have created a magnesium shortage. Either a shortage or an excess of magnesium can cause diarrhea. Fats in the diet sometimes are constipating and sometimes have laxative action. People with diarrhea should always consider the possibility that an infection is the cause. Manipulating food intake can also help in this case, but medical treatment may

be needed too.

Dear Dr. Meinig: My wife has diabetes and recently has been having eye problems that her doctor says is diabetic retinopathy. Could you tell us what that means and if anything can be done about it nutritionally. She has had a good laser treatment.

S.M.

Dear S.M.: These are degenerative changes that take place in the retina of the eye, especially in those who have had diabetes for a long time. Little spots of bleeding and tiny aneurysms occur along with some seepage of wax-like substances.

CONTROL OF THE diabetes and of blood pressure is very important. Careful regular monitoring of insulin is necessary. Everyone seems to know the importance of cutting sweets from the diet of diabetics, but all too often, the diet that is adopted leaves much to be desired. I have found many diabetics using mostly canned foods, refined grains, deep-fat-fried and other greasy foods, coffee and tea, dietetic soft drinks, etc. All of these should be replaced with highly nutritious fresh or frozen vegetables (a good proportion eaten raw), and 100 percent whole grains. Fish, poultry and meat provide very important protein for the healing process in the eye. Supplements of vitamins C and E should be considered.

Some Japanese researchers recently found that patients with diabetic retinopathy had deficiencies of magnesium. The red blood cells, plasma, and urine of 109 diabetics were studied, and 33 others who did not have the disease. The diabetics, and particularly those with advanced and severe retinopathy, had much lower magnesium levels than the non-diabetics.

Magnesium is known to activate enzymes inside cells; it helps promote the absorption of other minerals such as calcium, phosphorus, sodium, and potassium; helps regulate the acid-base balance; and helps utilize the B complex, and vitamins C and E in the body. It is found chiefly in fresh green vegetables as it is the essential element in chlorophyll. Other good sources of magnesium are raw unmilled wheat germ, sea food, soybeans, figs, kelp, corn, apples, seeds and nuts, especially almonds.

Because this disease is a serious cause of blindness, it behooves the patient and the family to recognize how important is regular medical care, and quality nutrition. It is good that you have written about your concern, and your desire to know more about his condition. With such support your wife will have every opportunity to deal wisely with her problems, and to keep all her tissues in the best possible condition.