

CURING A LIFE-TIME OF CONSTIPATION

Dear Dr. Meinig:

We are what might be termed "an old married couple"—My wife Mildred is 73 and I am 81. The problem that has plagued us to some extent our whole married life is her constipation. It has in the past two years become worse and and lately, a lot worse. She has been plagued with this problem for most of her life.

We have tried in many ways to find a remedy that could be counted on. From time to time some things have helped. One remedy that worked quite well for a number of years was Haley's M.O., then that had to be discontinued because it upsets the stomach.

A couple of years ago we went to a doctor in Ventura for diagnosis and treatment—the results were not satisfactory -- the condition persisted. One thing that seems to be a recurring condition and one that aggravates the problem, is a build-up that results in a lump that is in some instances impossible to pass.

Many different laxatives have been tried, some seem to work for a while, but it becomes necessary to try to find something more effective. We are at our wits end to find a solution.

It might be important to mention that we have always eaten and drank moderately, what we believe to be a balanced diet. We are not food fadists -- we are not alcoholics and not tee-totalers. Cocktails weekends only -- and then sparingly.

We both have diverticulitis problems -- in the case of my wife, more pronounced than mine. But, back to the constipation problem -- here is where we need to find a way that will really help her. She has used laxatives and enemas (colonics quite some time ago). It would be good to find help in one form or another. There are, however, times when there is no problem at all, for weeks at a time.

We would be most interested in knowing what your recommendations might be. Please let us hear from you. E.G.H.

Dear E.G.H.:

Like most problems humans fall heir to, constipation and diverticulitis have numbers of causes. The prime one in both of these conditions has been the excessive milling and processing of grains and other foods. Somehow most people, even those who are diet conscious, still go along day after day consuming their white bread, rolls, crackers and boxed cereals. Not only do the majority of Americans consume these foods each day but they continue to believe them to be an acceptable part of a "good" diet.

Dr. Dennis Burkett, the well-known British doctor, is recognized for his extensive research on this subject. For over 30 years he has been writing articles and lecturing about the variety of illnesses ~~that result~~ ^{from} the use of these fabricated ~~foods~~ ^{nutrient foods are} and how the diseases they cause are quickly reversed when ~~these low~~ ^{replaced} by natural complexed carbohydrates. While bland diets were often recommended for constipation and diverticulitis, the simple dietary rule he developed -- "soft foods in, hard out. Hard foods in, soft out" -- provided instant understanding of what takes place in our intestines.

Dr. Burkett has not been alone in warning the public of the harm created by the fabricated foods. The fallacy of their use is well

documented in the scientific literature and has been the main information thrust of nutritionists for over 50 years. The public interest in nutrition has come a long way but most people continue to use these foodless foods. No doubt the billions spent advertising them play a key role in the reasons for their purchase.

It is the hard, coarse, fibrous parts of grain, of the sugar cane stalk, and of vegetables that is lost during processing. The fibrous part of foods is indigestible and creates the bulk that proves beneficial to intestinal health. It absorbs water, allowing for normal stool consistency and easy evacuation. Capt. Thomas L. Cleave, a Royal Navy surgeon, found constipation of sailors at sea continually posed a health problem. He learned it could be solved by feeding ^{his crew members} some bran every mealtime.

Another surgeon, Dr. Maurice Frohm, upon learning of Capt. Cleave's work, fed bran to all his surgery cases. He was pleasantly surprised that in 1500 operations over four years, none of his patients suffered from post-operative blood clots.

Many people experience quite a bit of gas when first eating bran. This usually disappears in a week or two. A number of investigators prefer oat bran to that of wheat, but most studies have concerned wheat bran. Those allergic to wheat should choose oats instead.

Too little water consumed each day is a factor in some cases of constipation as is too little exercise. When people get to "vintage age" it is easy to let up on former exercise activity. Walking and swimming are two excellent ways to keep up with body needs. The loss of calcium from bones and the osteoporosis that results, is a common occurrence when people allow themselves to become sedentary.

The food we eat must be properly broken down during the digestive process or constipation can result even though the diet is satisfactory. As we become older it is common to experience a loss of the digestive enzymes supplied by the stomach, pancreas and liver. When stomach acid is deficient it can be provided. Supplements of betaine hydrochloride or glutamic acid, pancreatic enzymes and bile, are available. Although these can be purchased over the counter, it would be good to have professional advice about their use. This can be difficult as not all doctors have training in the use of these enzymes.

Constipation can also result from a Vitamin B deficiency and strangely enough, too much vitamin B also causes the problem. Supplements of pantothenic acid have been known to help in treatment.

A simple exercise that has enabled some people to get immediate bowel movement results is to bend the head and neck slowly toward one shoulder and then the other. Take at least 30 seconds for each side, letting the pull be slow and steady. A strain will be felt up into the head and down alongside the neck and shoulders. Bend each direction five times. Then rest and relax completely for two or three minutes, and repeat the exercise. Some tension is necessary but don't overdo it, particularly in the beginning.

In addition to the refined grains, wheat, white rice and rye, a number of other foods may contribute to constipation; sugar, boiled milk, cheese, gelatin, calcium supplements, gruels (porridge) and soups. Fats in some people are constipating and in others cause looseness of stools.

People become very dependent on laxatives. Many of them have detrimental effects. Mineral oil should never be used, as it causes a loss of

the fat soluble vitamins A, D, E, and K, along with carotene. Incidentally, Haley's M. O. is composed of milk of magnesia and 25% mineral oil. If you use a lot of milk, its high calcium content could result in a magnesium shortage. Overcooking can also cause hard stools.

The foods to eat to correct constipation include plenty of fresh (not canned) vegetables. Include at least two raw salads per day. They provide not only fiber, but essential nutrients. Olive oil and vinegar are preferred salad dressings. One hundred percent grain products, some whole fruit (not fruit juices), along with some meat, fish, eggs or poultry furnish sound nutrition and bowel regularity.

Constipation is not a normal situation in spite of the great number of its victims. Having personally suffered its problems as a teenager and through my twenties, I am fully aware of the distress you endure. Let me know of your progress. I would like to see that at long last you have achieved the peace and comfort of a normal functioning intestine.