



OTC: laxatives

When to use

A laxative should only be used as a last resort after all other measures to treat constipation, such as increasing fiber intake, engaging in regular exercise, and consuming lots of water, have failed.



Bulk laxatives

How they work: Absorb liquid in the intestines and swell to form a soft, bulky stool instead of being digested.

Examples:

Methylcellulose (Citrucel)

Psyllium (Metamucil)

Polycarbophil (Fibercon)

Uses: produces soft stool for those who have dry, hard stools in one to three days.

Contraindications: HTN, diabetes, kidney disease, partial obstruction of the bowels, esophageal obstruction.

Osmotic laxatives

How they work: It draws water into the intestines, softening and swelling the stool.

Examples: Polyethylene glycol (Miralax, peglax, and glycolax)

Magnesium hydroxide (milk of mag)

Lactulose (kristalose, Generlac, and enulose)

Uses: low dose for daily for constipation.

High dose for diagnostic and surgical procedures.

Contraindications: CKD, pregnancy, cardiac diseases

Osmotic Purgatives

Lactulose

Saline purgative



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Caution

Symptoms over use: blood in stools, electrolytes imbalance, N/V, chronic constipation.

Long term use: decrease bowel function, dependency, heartburn, diarrhea.

Who is at risk: ulcerative colitis, anorexia and other eating disorders.

How they work: They function by stimulating the nerves that regulate the muscles lining the digestive tract, thereby promoting bowel movement.

Examples: Bisacodyl (Dulcolax, Ducodyl, and fleet laxatives)

Castor oil, Senna glycoside (Senokot, and Ex-lax)

Uses: low intestinal stimulation, constipation due to opioids.

Contraindications: pregnancy, appendicitis



Surfactant laxatives

How they work: aid water to enter stool and soften it for easier passage.

Examples: docusate sodium (colace), surfak.

Uses: constipation, decrease straining

Contraindications: rectal bleeding, anal fissure, and blocks bowels

references:

Rosenthal, L. & Burchum, J. (2021). *Lehne's pharmacotherapeutics for advanced practice nurses and physician assistants* (2nd ed.). Elsevier.