

[IMAGE]

A Vibrating Capsule for Constipation? Consider Natural Options Instead

By David Seaman, DC, MS, DABCN

Instead of helping constipation sufferers to really address the numerous lifestyle issues that promote constipation, which will be discussed shortly, modern science would like us to instead consider the "vibrating capsule." What will they think of next? Here is how it works: Patients swallow a capsule that contains a tiny receiver and vibrating mechanism. Eight hours later, the capsule is activated by an external transmitter that generates three pulses per minute to imitate the internal pacemaker of the colon.

Twenty-six of 28 patients completed a study investigating the effectiveness of this capsule. The outcome was an increase in bowel movements from about two per week to four per week.

Improving Bowel Habits Naturally: Nutritional Options

I suppose a vibrating capsule might be useful if you are pursuing constipation as a lifestyle and refuse to adopt healthy habits. It might also be useful if you have tried everything else and continue to suffer. However, most people can dramatically improve bowel habits simply by adopting healthy behaviors.

Unfortunately, when it comes to diet, the typical recommendations from various organizations are actually "constipation-promoting diets." Consider that the DASH diet for hypertension recommends we consume between 6-12 servings of grains and grain products per day, but only three servings need to be whole grains. This means we should eat between 3-9 servings of refined grains per day.

constipation - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark This is the same recommendation as the food pyramid diet. Clearly, anyone with constipation should eat virtually no refined grains. In other words, make every calorie count to help fight constipation.

So, what *should* we eat? On a caloric basis, *vegetables and fruit* are substantially higher in fiber than whole grains. Prunes happen to be a historical favorite for reducing constipation, and have been shown to be effective in that regard.

Psyllium husk powder is also quite effective and delivers no caloric penalty. For the treatment of irritable bowel syndrome with psyllium fiber, 20 grams is a supplemental target, which has been shown to be superior than 10 grams. And this dosing level improves constipation, abdominal pain and diarrhea. Some people need less psyllium fiber and others need more. Adequate hydration should also be emphasized in general and especially when taking psyllium husk, as it absorbs water. A Medscape review states that psyllium is arguably the best treatment for long-term constipation.

Magnesium citrate is often prescribed as an osmotic laxative; the over-the-counter medication Citroma is an example. A better approach would be to acknowledge that the majority of Americans do not consume the RDA for magnesium, which means we should improve magnesium status with diet and supplementation.

Vegetables, fruits, nuts and sweet potatoes contain magnesium and fiber. Supplemental magnesium in the context of achieving adequacy need not take into consideration the need to generate an osmotic laxative effect, because the goal should be to help a patient realize normal bowel habits. In other words, magnesium malate, aspartate, amino acid chelates, etc., can be utilized.

Between the combination of diet and supplements, the target should be approximately 1,000 mg of magnesium per day to achieve a positive magnesium balance.

Other Considerations

Psychological issues are also very important to consider when it comes to constipation. Infants will literally eat and then have a movement, which is a normal reflexive response. As adults, we need to understand that both the problem and retaining approach is normal.

Consider the behavior of your children. Little kids tend to follow the call of nature. However, as they age, many suppress the urge to defecate for social reasons. The denial of this urge can ultimately lead to constipation, such that retraining is often required to recognize, respect and follow-through on the call.

Several factors are directly related to increased colonic activity. These include waking up in the morning, physical activity, and eating. Medline Plus also has [helpful advice](#).

Editor's note: Talk to your doctor for additional information and before taking any nutritional supplement, particularly if you have a pre-existing health condition.

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