

Application of laxative foods in prevention and treatment of constipation

Constipation

Constipation is a public health problem in both developed and developing countries.¹ It is one of the most prevalent functional gastrointestinal disorders which significantly affect health-related quality of patient's life because of a wide range of signs and symptoms including discomfort, restlessness, vomiting, abdominal distension, gut obstruction and perforation.^{2,3} Nearly everyone has experienced constipation during his/her life affecting the patients' quality of life. The prevalence rates of the disease are controversial. A prevalence of 50% has been reported among adults and more prevalent among women and old people and about 11-38% of pregnant women suffer from constipation especially in the third trimester. On the other hand, only about one-third of constipated patients seek medical care and many of them self-treat their symptoms either by increasing their fiber intake or by using over-the-counter laxatives.^{1,4}

Food stimulates or drug which concept may be of prior treatment?

Chronic constipation is a hard-to-treat condition, so prevention may be the best solution but there are a wide-range of treatment measures such as pharmacological (over-the-counter) laxative which are the most common treatment one for constipation.⁵ However, these drugs are not ideal in clinical point of view because of their potentially adverse side effects and thus, the patients should be awarded of its side effect.⁶ Therefore, alternative treatment measures are required. Although there is limited data on the effectiveness of life-style and behavioral modification, it is advisable to consider it as a first line of treatments.⁷ Increasing fiber intakes through dietary or medicinal intervention (laxative foods) has been well accepted as a method of choice in treatment modality to relieve symptoms, especially for mild complaints of infrequency or hard stools.⁶ The gentlest remedies for constipation include increased physical activities, certain yoga postures, increase of fluid intake, and dietary changes including increased fiber and fruit intake.

Laxative foods

As mentioned above, most of the constipated patients do not consider the order of treatment according to guidelines and used to intake over-the-counter (OTC) laxatives and other related medicines without any trying on natural laxatives as food ingredients like fruit, dried fruit, seeds and other food stimulates. Since medicines have been shown some side effects and usually patients have not been satisfied with their treatments, food-based, natural, alternatives are needed to substitute for the currently on the market OTC laxatives and fibre supplements in first line of treatment. Some foods and other fiber rich agents making stools bulky and helps to intestinal frequent movements and contractions and consequently results in prevention and treatment of constipation.⁸ Some of these food ingredients such as plum, fig, flax seed, and bran because of their high dietary fiber results in easy stool pass then leading to decrease constipation.⁹⁻¹³ Beside fiber contents of this food stimulates other agent such as cysteine

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Fereshteh Aliasghari,¹ Aziz Homayouni Rad,²
Negar Motayaghani,³ Hamide Homayouni
Rad,² Farnaz Sahhaf⁴

¹Department of Nutrition, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Iran

²Department of Food Science & Technology, Tabriz University of Medical sciences, Iran

³Department of Anesthesiology, UCLA, USA

⁴Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Tabriz University of Medical sciences, Iran

Correspondence: Aziz Homayouni Rad, Associate Professor, Department of Food Science & Technology, Faculty of Nutrition and Food Sciences, Tabriz University of Medical sciences, Tabriz, IR Iran, Email %20homayounia@tbzmed.ac.ir

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protease or actinidin of kiwifruit, Mucilage of flaxseed consists of acidic and neutral polysaccharides, oxyphenisatin and high contents of sorbitol and chlorogenic acids of plum are considered to act as contact laxative and lead to soft stool and bulky fecal and increases fecal excretion.¹⁴⁻¹⁶

All constipation types may be prevented and/or treated with laxatives foods successfully. So, it is suggested to use laxative foods alone or in combination with each other to prevent or treatment of the constipation.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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