

- Chapter 35
- Drugs Used to Treat Constipation and Diarrhea
- Learning Objectives
- State the underlying causes of constipation
- Explain the meaning of “normal” bowel habits
- Cite nine causes of diarrhea
- Describe medical conditions in which laxatives should *not* be used
- Learning Objectives (cont’d)
- Identify electrolytes that should be monitored whenever prolonged or severe diarrhea is present
- Describe nursing assessments needed to evaluate the patient’s state of hydration when suffering from either constipation or dehydration
- Constipation
- Infrequent, incomplete or painful elimination of feces
- “Normal” bowel habits vary
  - Daily bowel movement not necessary
  - As long as patient’s health is good and stool not hardened or impacted, this is acceptable
- Constipation (cont’d)
- **Causes**
  - Improper diet

- Too little fluid intake
- Lack of exercise—sedentary habits
- Failure to respond to normal defecation impulses
- Muscular weakness of the colon
- Diseases such as anemia and hypothyroidism
- Frequent use of constipating medicines
- Tumors of the bowel or pressure from tumors
- Diseases of the rectum
- Diarrhea
- An increase in the frequency of fluid content of bowel movements
- Diarrhea (cont'd)
- **Causes**
  - Intestinal infections
  - Spicy or fatty foods
  - Enzyme deficiencies
  - Excessive use of laxatives
  - Drug therapy
  - Emotional stress
  - Hyperthyroidism
  - Inflammatory bowel disease
  - Surgical bypass of the intestine
- Treatment of Altered Elimination
- Constipation

- High-fiber diet, adequate hydration, exercise
  - Use of laxatives should be avoided
- Treatment of Altered Elimination (cont'd)
- Diarrhea: treatment depends on specific cause of diarrhea, which may be:
  - Chronic, mild or severe
  - Indication of disease of stomach, small or large intestine
  - Psychogenic
  - Symptom of cancer of the colon or rectum
- Treatment of Altered Elimination (cont'd)
- Nursing process
  - Assessment: obtain history, medications, activity and exercise, elimination patterns, nutritional history, basic assessment, vital signs; review lab reports
  - Monitor electrolytes in prolonged diarrhea
  - Monitor hydration
- Learning Objectives
- Identify the indications for use, method of action, and onset of action for stimulant laxatives, saline laxatives, lubricant or emollient laxatives, bulk-forming laxatives, and fecal softeners
- State the differences between locally acting and systemically acting antidiarrheal agents
- Learning Objectives (cont'd)
- Cite conditions that generally respond favorably to antidiarrheal agents
- Review medications studied to date and prepare a list of those that may cause diarrhea

- Laxatives
- Stimulant laxatives
  - Act directly on intestines; promote peristalsis and evacuation
  - Used to relieve acute constipation and routine elimination of gas and feces before radiologic examination of kidneys, colon, intestine, or gallbladder
- Laxatives (cont'd)
- Saline laxatives
  - Hypertonic compounds draw water into the intestines from surrounding tissues, distending bowel and causing peristalsis
- Laxatives (cont'd)
  - Fecal softeners: draw water into bowel to soften stools; do not cause peristalsis
    - Used routinely for prophylactic purposes
  - Bulk-forming laxatives
    - Drug of choice for those who use laxatives routinely; they absorb irritating substances and soften stools
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- Laxatives (cont'd)
  - Lubricant laxatives
    - Lubricate intestinal wall, allowing for smooth passage of fecal contents
    - Used as prophylactic for patients who should not strain during defecation
- Laxatives (cont'd)

- Antidiarrheal Agents
- Locally acting agents
  - Absorb excess water to cause a formed stool and absorb irritants or bacteria causing diarrhea
- Systemic agents
  - Act through autonomic nervous system to reduce peristalsis and motility of the GI tract, allowing the mucosal lining to absorb nutrients, water, and electrolytes, leaving a formed stool
  
- Antidiarrheal Agents (cont'd)
- Help control inflammatory bowel disease
- Postgastrointestinal surgery patients may require agents to help absorb electrolytes and fluids
- Many cases are self-limiting but may be prescribed by health care professionals
  
- Antidiarrheal Agents (cont'd)
  
- Medications That May Cause Diarrhea
- Antibiotics
- Antacids containing magnesium