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A CONCISE UPDATE OF IMPORTANT ISSUES CONCERNING NATURAL HEALTH INGREDIENTS

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MAINTAINING REGULARITY: CONSTIPATION, FIBER AND NATURAL LAXATIVES

"The civilized colon is a poor cripple, maimed, misshapen, overstretched in parts, contracted in other parts, prolapsed, adherent, "kinked", infected, paralyzed, inefficient, incompetent. It is the worst abused and the most variously damaged of any organ of the body... The civilized colon... is a Golgotha of pollution, a veritable Pandora's box of disease."

John Harvey Kellogg, 1918 (1)

Perhaps before any other disease was labeled as being the result of civilization, constipation and its presumed consequences were bill boarded as the quintessential disease of civilized, urbanized, and sedentary men... and women. Many considered it to be the root of all diseases, and treatment options have been varied and numerous. In this review, we hope to show the relationship between constipation and other conditions with which it is related, either as a consequence or causative factor. We will focus primarily on the various natural ingredients that have been used to treat constipation and the additional benefits of dietary fiber.

Perhaps defining constipation is nearly as difficult as defining "normal" stool frequency. Disagreement on what constitutes "normal" is well established when asking various health care providers and even more varied when asking patients. Most would agree that stool frequency less than 3 times per week would define constipation, although many would say that less than once per day may constitute constipation. In addition to frequency, difficult evacuation of hard, dry stools may constitute the diagnosis of constipation. Regardless of how constipation is defined, we should remember that constipation is a symptom, not a disease. The underlying causes of constipation may be quite varied and therefore treatment protocols vary as well. Causes may include endocrine disorders such as diabetes and hypothyroidism, neurological diseases such as MS, Parkinson's or spinal cord injuries, or diseases within the colon/anal area like anal fissures or inflammatory bowel disease. Many drug and surgery interventions will also lead

to symptoms of constipation. The primary cause, however, is the diet and lifestyle factors that are common in the American culture.

Maintaining regularity is almost a non-issue for those without constipation, but for those who suffer from it (or think they do) it is an all consuming passion. Historically, constipation has always been high on the list of symptoms which patients self diagnose and self treat. Over-the-counter (OTC) remedies have been sold and marketed as long as anyone can remember. In fact, the concern over constipation may have been the greatest impetus for the breakfast cereal industry in the early 1900's.

Constipation Research

Because of the issue of definition, it has always been difficult to study constipation in the general population. What we have learned is that women, especially petite women within child-bearing age, seem to be the