

Nature-Ease

by ChiroNutraceutical



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If you don't get enough roughage in your diet, if you're constipated, or have irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), you may be taking a bulking agent like Metamucil, Citrucel, or Fiber-Con to make your stools larger and softer. If so, you may be pouring sugar or aspartame into your intestines.

Sugar feeds the bad bacteria that can lead to fermentation, gas, and a suppressed immune system. Aspartame is an artificial sweetener linked to so many health problems that it takes a book that's nearly 1,000 pages long to document all of them (Roberts, J.J. MD. Aspartame Disease: An Ignored Epidemic, Sunshine Sentinel Press, Inc., West Palm Beach, FL). You may need a bulking agent. But you don't need one with sugar or aspartame.

Psyllium comes from the *Plantago ovata* plant. Sometimes the seeds and husk are used as a bulking agent. Both are mucilaginous, which means that when you put them in water, they absorb a lot of water and form a gel, softening and increasing the size of solid wastes. Psyllium is particularly resistant to fermentation, so it's not likely to cause gas. It contains more fiber and it breaks down more slowly, producing large amounts of butyric acid. Butyric acid prevents the development of cancer cells and appears to protect against colon cancer. In one study, a group of colon cancer patients who took 20 grams of psyllium seed a day for three months had a 42 percent increase in their butyric acid levels.

Nature-Ease's Many Uses

The same butyric acid that blocks cancer cells may be responsible for psyllium's beneficial activity in people with ulcerative colitis. When colitis patients were given 10 grams of psyllium seed twice a day, their remission was the same as when they took drugs containing mesalamine. You may be able to avoid more expensive medications.

Psyllium worked in 85 percent of people with chronic constipation with no pathological cause. It even reduced constipation by 37 percent in some patients who had rectal and intestinal disorders. Check with the doctor before taking anything for constipation to make sure you're not masking symptoms from a more serious condition.

The mucilaginous effect of psyllium soothes your intestines. It significantly reduced bleeding from hemorrhoids in a study of 50 people. But to be effective with hemorrhoids, you need to take it for at least a month. Psyllium's ability to absorb water also makes it valuable for people with diarrhea. In one study, psyllium decreased the occurrence of incontinent stools by a full 50 percent.

The longer you take this fiber, the better it seems to work. It lowers total cholesterol and the potentially harmful LDL cholesterol. A group of people who took a little over five grams of psyllium twice a day for two months had lowered total cholesterol and LDL levels. Another group of elderly patients had a 20 percent reduction in total cholesterol after taking psyllium for four months. Men and postmenopausal women, but not premenopausal women, had a significant drop in triglyceride levels after taking 15 grams of psyllium.

Avoid Harmful Ingredients

Many people with constipation reach for a laxative containing senna. It works, but while it stimulates muscle contractions and relieves constipation it can cause your intestines to lose some elasticity, creating a laxative dependency. A number of laxatives contain phenolphthalein, a chemical linked to an increased risk for cancer.

The FDA has proposed a ban on phenolphthalein, but it's still in some products. Read labels carefully and avoid phenolphthalein.

Bottom line

Psyllium is a naturally occurring bulking agent with no side effects – unless you have an allergy to the plant. It is most effective when taken for several months. Begin using the lowest amount in divided doses. Whether you have constipation, diarrhea, or intestinal inflammation, psyllium may be an effective and inexpensive remedy. Because it contains no artificial sweeteners, sugar, or potentially harmful chemicals, it's safer than other over-the-counter bulking agents.

Monograph, Plantago ovata (Psyllium). Alternative Medicine Review, vol. 7, no. 7, 2002, 155-159.