



The American Journal of gastroenterology

June 2021

## **Efficacy and safety of over-the-counter therapies for chronic constipation; an updated systematic review**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1YCUumig7ekOWYOe0Q9GM5oeoVpz-l7Tb/view>

### Study Highlights

#### WHAT IS KNOWN

- ✓ Chronic constipation is a common condition that significantly affects quality of life.
- ✓ Approximately 40% of individuals with constipation self-treat with over-the-counter (OTC) laxatives.
- ✓ Multiple classes of OTC therapies are available for treating chronic constipation.
- ✓ Polyethylene glycol was the only OTC therapy to receive a strong recommendation based on high levels of evidence in a previous systematic review published in 2005.

#### WHAT IS NEW HERE

- ✓ The spectrum of OTC products that have been tested has increased and the quality of evidence has improved.
- ✓ There is now good evidence based on high-quality trials supporting the use of polyethylene glycol and senna for constipation.
- ✓ Moderate evidence supports the use of psyllium, fruits, magnesium-containing compounds, bisacodyl, and sodium picosulfate for the treatment of constipation.
- ✓ There is a clear need for more rigorous, high-quality studies using standardized endpoints.

#### Surfactants

Docusate is an anionic surfactant that is purported to lower the surface tension at the oil–water interface of stools, allowing water and lipids to penetrate, thereby hydrating and softening stool. Although docusate is one of the most commonly used OTC agents for the treatment of constipation, inconsistent clinical data have led to questions regarding its efficacy. There have been no additional studies since 2004 that met the inclusion criteria for this new analysis. We conclude that despite docusate's frequent use in constipated patients, there is little clinical evidence to support its use.

...

Overall, considering the differences in products tested, dosages used, and variability in study design, the current data suggest that both soluble fiber, psyllium, and mixed fiber (SupraFiber) have modest efficacy for treating constipation. The data are most robust for psyllium. However, it is worth noting that the highest graded placebo-controlled psyllium study (54) revealed no significant benefit over placebo and head-to-head trials revealed that psyllium is less effective than comparator agents (e.g., PEG, lactulose, and fruits).