

Laxative use by Community Pharmacy users in Southern Portugal

Introduction

The prevalence of constipation in the world population ranges from 2% to 28%.^{1,2} The acknowledgement of the circumstances associated with the history of symptoms and patient's perception of the changes in bowel habits are key points to treatment decision. Laxatives are among the most common drugs sold in pharmacies and present different mechanisms of action. The selection of an appropriate laxative requires an understanding on drug's mechanism of action, their efficacy, and the risks associated with their sporadic or continuous use.³


Objectives

✓ The aim of this study was the characterization of laxatives use by Pharmacy users, including the prevalence of use, types of laxatives used, and places for acquiring and obtaining advice on laxatives.

Methods

- ✓ A cross-sectional and descriptive study was performed;
- ✓ A structured questionnaire was used;
- ✓ Participants were enrolled in a Community Pharmacy located in Faro, Portugal;
- ✓ The enrolment period was 3 weeks;
- ✓ Inclusion criteria:
 - ✓ ≥18 years;
 - ✓ Voluntary participation in the study.
- ✓ Study sample:
 - ✓ 50 Pharmacy users;
 - ✓ Mainly women (74%);
 - ✓ Aged from 22 to 94 years (median of 59 years)

Results

- ✗ 
 - 88% participants reported to be suffering or to have previously suffered from **constipation**;
 - 62% suffering with **symptoms** for **more than 3 years**;



- 64% presented symptoms **more than once a week** in the previous year;
- 58% indicated to use a laxative.

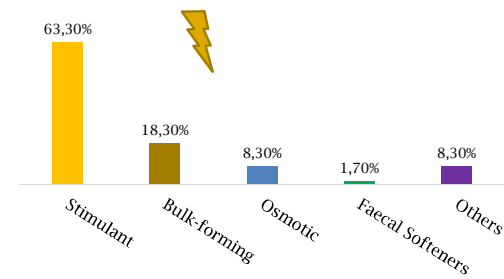


FIGURE 1: Characterization of laxative type use.

- Contact laxatives were the more often used (63,3%) (*Figure 1*);
- 54% used laxatives at least on a **weekly basis**;
- 38% were using laxatives on a **daily basis**;
- **Elderly** users (≥60 years) used laxatives **more often** (65% daily, p<0.001).
- 82% were **sedentary** (not practicing exercise or exercising less than once a week)
- **Pharmacies** were the preferred place to purchase laxatives (85%);
- ~ 40% of the users indicated to ask for health of acquisition.

Conclusion

A high rate and frequency of laxative use was identified in the study sample, particularly contact laxatives.

It is imperative, therefore, to **provide users with more information on non-pharmacological measures** to avoid and approach constipation and its symptoms, as well as **further information such as overuse complications**, allowing the **appropriate selection of the laxative**.

Pharmacy professionals have a key role on this area, and related education campaigns should be implemented.



Bibliography

- 1 - Wald A *et al.* A multinational survey of prevalence and patterns of laxative use among adults with self-defined constipation. *Aliment Pharmacol Ther.* (2008); 28(7):917-30.
- 2 - Gray JR, Frpc M. What is chronic constipation? Definition and diagnosis. *Can J Gastroenterol.* (2011); 21(25):7-10.
- 3 - Constipation: A Global Perspective.. 2010; available at <http://www.worldgastroenterology.org>.