Natural Laxatives: An appraisal of the literature

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Background

Constipation is mainly managed pharmacologically
The question was raised as to whether there were more natural methods of managing constipation?

Symptoms of constipation
• Difficulty passing stool
• Bloating, stomach ache, flatulence
• Nausea and loss of appetite
• Distressing and embarrassing

Consequences of constipation
• Haemorrhoids
• Faecal impaction
• Faecal incontinence
• Can be severe

Constipation is a significant problem
• Across acute nursing
• Locally at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals
Methods

- Nursing-led multidisciplinary group
- Systematic literature review
  - CINAHL, Medline, NHS Evidence
  - Current affairs websites
  - Charitable organisations
  - Trust Intranet
- Applied simple inclusion and exclusion criteria
- Evidence critically appraised detailing origin, epidemiology, methodology, recommendation.

Results

- 27 items of evidence reviewed
- Eight of the fifteen pieces of evidence recommending an increase in dietary fibre, were either original research or systematic reviews.
- Table One illustrates the evidence by recommendation, method and subject group.
### Table One

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dietary Fibre</th>
<th>Increased Fluid Intake</th>
<th>Exercise</th>
<th>Natural Laxative Mix</th>
<th>Regular Meals</th>
<th>Aloe Vera</th>
<th>Massage</th>
<th>Kiwi</th>
<th>Pear Juice</th>
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**Key:**
- **Methodology:** Position Statement, Case Guideline, Systematic Review, Qualitative Research, Pilot, Discussion Paper, Unidentified Method, Advice Randomised Controlled Trial
- **Subject Group:** Adults, Elderly, Women, Children, Renal Patients, Unknown
Discussion

• 3 of the items of evidence stated that the evidence was not suitably powered to make generalisable conclusions, these were all conducted before 2005.
• 55% of the evidence reviewed was dated 2005 or earlier
• There were different outcome measures used these included: laxative use, reduction in constipation as defined by the ROME criteria, reduction in faecal incontinence.
• Selig & Joy used a natural laxative mix but had to keep changing the contents of this mix to keep it palatable.

Conclusions

• A greater proportion of the evidence reviewed recommended an increase in dietary fibre and fluid intake.
• A nursing care guideline is being developed to incorporate this evidence into practice.
• This will be reviewed by both staff and patient governors to increase ownership and usability
References

1. Congress on Nursing Practice and Economics (unknown) Polypharmacy and the Older Adult, American Nurses' Association Position Statement
27. Hsieh C (2005) Treatment of constipation in older adults, American Family Physician, 72(11) 2277-2284