

# Laxatives – Consumption

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## Who suffers from constipation?

Constipation is a very common problem in developed countries, including the UK. Lack of fibre in the diet is the most common cause.

PAGB research found that 18% of people had experienced constipation in the last year<sup>1</sup>. Constipation affects twice as many women as men<sup>2</sup>, and is more common in the elderly. Approximately 40% of pregnant women experience constipation during their pregnancy<sup>3</sup>.

## How many laxatives are sold in the UK each year?

In 2009, there were 14.8 million packs of laxatives sold in the UK, worth £49.3 million in sales<sup>4</sup>. Over half of these were sold through pharmacy retailers, such as Boots and Superdrug, with the rest being sold in other stores<sup>5</sup>.

## How long should you take laxatives for?

Many people only experience constipation occasionally for a short period of time. In these cases, there are many over-the-counter products that are used safely and effectively to provide short-term relief.

Some people, such as the elderly, those taking medication that causes constipation as a side-effect, or those with an underlying medical condition, may have to take laxatives for much longer. This could be for many months, or even years. People should only take laxatives on a long-term basis under the supervision of their doctor who can recommend a type of laxative that is safe, reliable and effective for long-term use.

## Is laxative use in the UK increasing?

There is no evidence that laxative misuse is increasing; in fact the number of packs being sold has decreased over the past few years<sup>6</sup> which suggests that use is actually going down.

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<sup>1</sup> A picture of health – A survey of the nation's approach to everyday health and wellbeing, PAGB / Reader's Digest, 2005

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<sup>2</sup> NHS Choices: <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Constipation/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

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<sup>4</sup> Source IRI: 52 w/e 31 Oct 09.

<sup>5</sup> Source IRI: 57.6% of units are sold through the Chemists retail channel with remainder sold through Major Multiples and Convenience sector.

<sup>6</sup> OTC laxative unit sales: 2005: 16.4 million; 2006: 15.9 million; 2007: 16.0 million; 52 w/e 31 Oct 2009: 14.8 million. Source: IRI