



*Proprietary Association  
of Great Britain*

3 December 2009

## **PAGB Statement on Laxative Misuse**

In response to calls from the eating disorder charity 'Beat' that laxatives should be restricted to 'pharmacy' sale, PAGB<sup>1</sup> would like to point out that the vast majority of people use laxatives sensibly and according to the instructions, using as intended for the relief of constipation.

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>2</sup>. Nevertheless, the industry takes its responsibilities very seriously to ensure that laxatives are sold and promoted in a way that best informs and educates the public on their proper use. Restricting availability to pharmacy would disadvantage the majority of consumers who are helped by these products, without any evidence that it would reduce misuse.

As with all over the counter medicines, laxatives are regulated by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). They can be sold without prescription and outside pharmacies only when the MHRA considers it is safe to allow this. All pack sizes can legally be sold in supermarkets and non pharmacy outlets but manufacturers restrict sales of larger packs to pharmacies where advice is available. The packs all include dosage instructions and warnings that this dose should not be exceeded nor taken regularly without medical advice.

Sheila Kelly, Executive Director of PAGB comments: "Laxatives provide a safe and effective treatment for constipation and the vast majority of people take them properly according to the instructions. Sadly, a small minority of people use laxatives wrongly, in the mistaken belief that it will help them lose weight. Laxatives taken in this way encourage the body to lose water which is regained almost immediately. People using them for this purpose are therefore wasting their money. We encourage the provision of information which gets this message across to the people who are using them inappropriately, without restricting access for the people who benefit from using such products legitimately."

Medicines, whether over-the-counter or prescription, should always be taken according to the instructions on the pack. Anyone who is unsure about which

medicines are best for them or how a medicine should be used, should ask their pharmacist or doctor for advice.

**-ENDS -**

### **Notes to Editor**

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<sup>1</sup> PAGB (Proprietary Association of Great Britain) is the UK trade association that represents the manufacturers of over-the-counter medicines and health supplements.

<sup>2</sup> OTC laxative unit sales: 2005: 16.4 million; 2006: 15.9 million; 2007: 16.0 million.  
Source: IRI

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