

Living without Laxatives

Many people who suffer from bulimia and anorexia find themselves abusing laxatives that is, taking more than the recommended dose, or regularly taking laxatives over a period of weeks, months or even years.

Here are some ideas to help you come off laxatives. These are not hard and fast rules, but rather ideas and suggestions that some people have found useful, and which you might like to use as a starting point in your journey to recovery.

- Before you begin, try to prepare yourself mentally for the task ahead of you. Think about why you take laxatives - there are probably a number of reasons. Consider the situations in which you take laxatives: At a set time every day? After a binge? When you are alone or depressed? Try to focus on the positive side of giving up laxatives and write down some of the benefits of kicking the habit. Laxative abuse can have serious and long-term effects on your health. Your appearance is also likely to improve - most people find that their skin looks better and their stomach becomes less bloated. You will save money. You will be able to feel proud that you have managed to break out of the vicious circle of laxative abuse. You will be one step nearer to recovery from your eating disorder.
- If you have been taking laxatives for just a short while, or if you only take relatively small amounts, you may well be able to stop all at once. Throw away all your packets of laxatives; don't keep any in the house, and don't let yourself buy any more. This will not be easy, but some people do find that breaking the habit in this way works.
- If, however, you have been abusing laxatives for some time, or if you take large doses of laxatives, you may find that a more gradual approach is better. You could try cutting down the amount of laxatives you take - try reducing by ten percent each week, so that after ten weeks you will no longer be taking laxatives. Alternatively, you might like to try keeping certain days of the week 'laxative free', and then gradually increase the number of days when you don't take laxatives until you are no longer taking them at all. Keep a record of your progress.
- You will find it easier if you increase the amount of fibre in your diet. Baked potatoes, fruit, vegetables, wholemeal bread and dried fruit are all good sources of fibre. Do not eat large amounts of bran as this can interfere with the absorption of important vitamins and minerals. Do drink plenty of water.
- Try not to panic about gaining weight - some people do find that their weight increases when they stop taking laxatives, but this is invariably temporary. If you stop taking laxatives and eat a normal healthy diet, you will not become overweight. You might feel a bit bloated at first,

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but again this is temporary. Wearing loose clothes can help.

- Do not panic if you find that you become constipated. 'Rebound constipation' is a common, but not inevitable side effect of laxative abuse and will ease with time and with a healthy and normal-sized diet.
- Keep reminding yourself that all the medical evidence suggests that laxatives DO NOT aid weight loss. They simply make you dehydrated. It is fluids and valuable vitamins and minerals that are lost, rather than calories which the body absorbs very quickly.
- Support can really help you come off laxatives. Confide in someone who will understand what you are going through and who can offer you the encouragement and support you need. Sometimes a close friend or relative can help. You may have a sympathetic GP, counsellor, psychologist or psychiatrist. You may also find that referral to a gastroenterologist can be very helpful. Some people find that their local *beat* Self Help Group is a great source of support. Don't forget there are also the *beat* helplines.
- It is important that you tackle other aspects of your eating disorder at the same time as trying to come off laxatives. You will be no nearer to recovery if you stop taking laxatives and replace them by decreasing the amount you are eating, or start vomiting instead.
- Finally, try not to be depressed by setbacks. Giving up laxatives is not easy, and not everyone will succeed first time. Be kind to yourself and be proud of any progress you make. Take one day at a time.

beat is the leading UK wide charity providing information, help and support for people affected by eating disorders- anorexia, bulimia nervosa and binge eating disorder.

Details of local contacts are freely available to callers ringing our helplines.

beat services and support include:

- **Helplines:** national telephone, e-mail and text help-lines
- **Self Help:** UK wide network of groups run by volunteers
- **Information:** a website at www.b-eat.co.uk leaflets and literature for individuals and organisations details and contacts for treatment services in the UK
- **Training:** courses and conferences for health, education and social care staff
- **Research:** support for academic and clinical studies, and research trials

Eating disorders will be beaten

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