

Physical Complications of

Abuse of Laxatives, Diuretics & Diet Pills

Compensatory behaviours are commonly reported in individuals with eating disorders, that is, attempts by the person to prevent weight gain by 'undoing' the effects of eating. Three common methods of compensation are the misuse of laxatives, diuretics and diet pills. Laxatives and diuretic pills are an ineffective means of weight loss because they cause temporary fluid loss but do **not** result in a loss of calories. In addition, engaging in these compensatory behaviours can have adverse effects on overall health and wellbeing and are associated with numerous physical complications.

Physical Complications

Electrolyte Imbalance

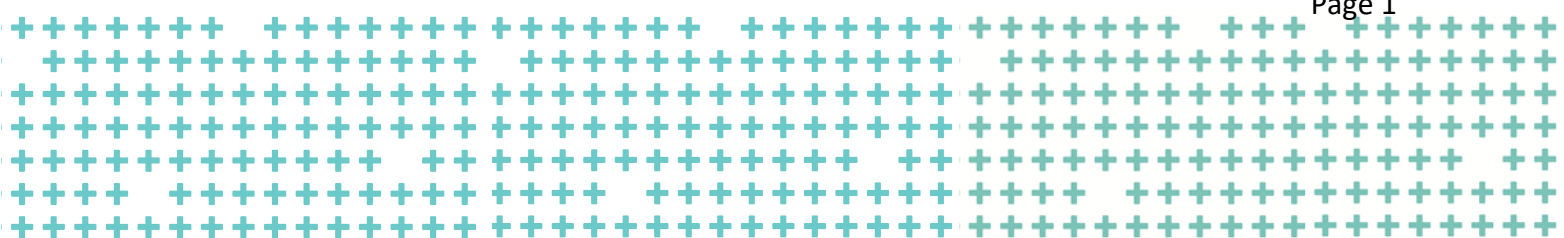
Frequent use of laxatives and diuretics can result in significant loss of water and electrolytes. These electrolytes are essential for proper bodily functioning, as they maintain the proper electrical and nerve impulses in muscles. If these impulses are not regulated in the heart, it can result in cardiac arrest. Significantly low levels of electrolytes can also cause weak muscles, seizures and paralysis in different parts of the body. Poor electrolyte levels can also cause kidney problems and impact digestion.

Dehydration and Oedema

Laxative and diuretic misuse can often cause severe dehydration as a result of fluid loss from the body. This can result in muscle weakness, vision difficulties, tremors and fainting and even death. Often, medical assistance is needed to rehydrate the body sufficiently and safely. Alternating periods of dehydration and "rebound" excessive water retention can occur. Many people experience oedema which causes swelling in the face, ankles and fingers.

Dependency

People can become dependent on laxatives, diet pills and diuretics after heavy use over an extended period of time. This can result in the body no longer responding to the recommended dosage of these supplements, and higher amounts are required to achieve the same effect. This often results in dangerous use, which can result in all of the physical complications described previously.



Organ Damage

Frequent use of laxatives and diet pills can cause severe damage to internal organs. Laxatives can cause extensive damage to the colon, through infection or stretching. If your colon is stretched or 'lazy,' it will move waste through the digestive system extremely slowly and will result in chronic constipation and pain. Frequent laxative use can also result in the onset of irritable bowel syndrome and interferes with bowel functioning in general. Symptoms such as gas, bloating, pain, mucus or blood in stool or the inability to control the bowel. Both laxative and diet pill abuse can cause liver damage. Symptoms of liver damage include jaundice, abdominal pain, skin discomfort and itching, dark-coloured urine and pale or tar-coloured stool.

Laxative abuse can also cause kidney damage and has been documented as a cause of kidney stones in individuals with eating disorders. There are also higher levels of renal inflammation that have been associated with excessive laxative use.

Cardiovascular Complications

Laxative and diuretic abuse has been associated with seizures and cardiac arrest.

References:

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