Diet teas... or diet tease? [1]

Dear Alice,

I just got a diet tea that contains senna. How is this herb bad for your health? Is it unsafe to drink it everyday to lose weight?

Thank you very much.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Many "diet" teas are available on the market. Some contain senna, while others include aloe, cascara sagrada, and/or buckthorn. Senna is an FDA-approved nonprescription laxative, effective for treating constipation, as well as for clearing the bowel before diagnostic tests such as colonoscopy. Senna is also used for irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), hemorrhoids, and weight loss, though the efficacy of senna for these uses is unclear. However, products containing senna should not be used for more than two weeks, as drinking diet teas may produce diarrhea, nausea, stomach cramps, and serious dehydration.

Remember, just because an ingredient is labeled ?all natural? doesn't mean that it is safe ? this is highly true for senna?s laxative effects. Contrary to popular belief, laxatives do not reduce or prevent the absorption of calories from food. They also will not help a person shed fat. Rather, laxatives interfere with nutrient absorption, leading to the loss of important electrolytes (salts, such as sodium and potassium). This can contribute to the development of heart function disorders, muscle weakness, liver damage, and other harmful effects.

Your gastrointestinal tract can also become severely damaged by regular use of laxatives [2]. The intestines contain muscles that contract to move food through the digestive system. Consistent laxative use causes the intestinal muscles to weaken. As a result, when some users finally stop taking laxatives, they have a harder time (no pun intended) making a bowel movement, and become constipated and bloated. Some may even resort to returning to laxative use to relieve the constipation, thereby creating a vicious cycle. The best defense is not to become hooked on diet tea or any other type of stimulant laxative, including senna, from the very beginning.
In conclusion, it appears to be unsafe to consume diet teas on the daily (those that contain senna, as well as those with other natural laxative ingredients). Instead of guzzling down diet teas, you may want to take a more active approach to healthy weight regulation, such as incorporating moderate exercise [3] and healthy food choices [4] into your daily routine.

Alice!
Category:
Nutrition & Physical Activity [5]
Weight Gain & Loss [6]
Disordered Eating & Eating Disorders [7]

Related questions
Herbal "diet teas" for weight loss? Herbalicious? [8]
Kombucha? Diet supplement? [9]
Solid versus liquid calories? Which is better? [10]
Herbal teas tame the munchies, but are they a healthy substitute? [11]

Published date:
Jun 09, 2000
Last reviewed on:
Jul 30, 2015