



# Constipation: An ethno-botanical study of medicinal plants used for constipation in Shahrekord city, Chaharmahal & Bakhtiari province, Iran

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## Abstract

Constipation is a common gastrointestinal problem in society, both in children and in adults, which imposes stupendous costs on society. For centuries, people have used medicinal plants, herbal teas, and teas to relieve digestive problems, including to stimulate the digestive system and reduce constipation. Therefore, in this study we sought to investigate the indigenous and ethnobotanical knowledge regarding constipation in children and infants in Sharekord. The present ethnobotanical study was carried out through a questionnaire in Shahrekord. This study was conducted from April 2017 to February 2018 through face-to-face interviews and a questionnaire among 29 traditional therapists. The results of this study showed that medicinal plants such as *Descurainia sophia* (L.) Prantle., *Rumex pulcher* L., *Alyssum spp.* Stead. Ex Boiss., *Prunus amygdalus* L., *Astragalus adscendens* Bioss. & Hausskn., *Echinops persicus* Stev. & Fisch., *Plantago major* L., *Rheum ribes* L., *Stachys lavandulifolia*, *Plantago major*, *Alcea spp.*, *Glycyrrhiza glabra* L., *Peganum harmala* L., *Pistachia atlanta* Desf. and *Prangos ferulacea* L. are traditionally used to treat constipation in children and infants.

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## Introduction

Constipation refers to delayed or difficulty passing of stools that lasts two weeks or more. The diagnosis of constipation depends on the consistency of the stool, the frequency of bowel movements, and difficulty in passing stools [1].

Constipation is a common gastrointestinal problem in society, both in children and adults, which imposes stupendous costs on society [2-5]. Constipation is a symptom, not a disease [6]. The actual prevalence of this problem in children is unknown, but various studies at the community level have shown that its prevalence is between 10-20% in adults and 0.7-29.6% in children in Western and Asian countries [7-9]. Constipation accounts for 3-5% of the referrals to pediatricians, and one third of children aged 6 to 12 years old have constipation at least once a year. Ninety five percent of children who are examined for constipation do not have an underlying pathology [10-12]. Children with constipation typically have less appetite and little fiber intake. Gastroesophageal reflux disease manifests as short, limited, and asymptomatic gastric contents flowing back to the esophagus, which is common in infancy, especially in the first six

months of life [13]. Studies have shown that constipation is due to reasons such as the lack of taking adequate amounts of fluids, especially water, during physical activity or in hot areas, ignoring the urge for bowel movements due to not wanting to have their play interrupted by a trip to the bathroom and gradual decrease in colonic motility, a change in living place or travel, the fear of the toilet environment, the disruption of the normal and everyday order of life, the beginning of schooling and the inability to use the school's toilets and the consumption of some drugs [14,15]. Treatments for constipation include osmotic drugs, selective drugs, stimulant laxatives, fibrous drugs, fiber-rich diets, and stool-enlarging drugs [16]. Ethnobotany can provide ideas for modern pharmacology, and many medicinal plants that have been introduced in ethnobotany have been shown to be effective in experimental pharmacology as well [17-21].

For centuries, people have used medicinal plants, herbal teas, and teas to relieve digestive problems, including stimulating the digestive system and reducing constipation. Constipation is one of the most common problems for which people are seeking out a plant-based de-

finitive treatment for it. It is easy to find herbal drugs for constipation. In fact, most of over-the-counter laxatives contain herbal compounds. Many laxative plants contain anthraquins or induce bowel movement. These laxatives act by absorbing fluid into the intestine and increasing bowel movement. The bowel movement helps the stool passes out of the body.

It is essential to add fiber and fluids to the diet of people suffering from constipation. In this study, we sought to investigate the indigenous and ethnobotanical knowledge regarding constipation of children and infants in Shahrekord.

## Methods

### Area of study

Shahrekord city is located southwest of Iran. Shahrekord is the capital of Chaharmahal & Bakhtiari province in Iran. Shahrekord has a population of 169199 people. The language of the people is Persian (Farsi). The Main job of people is agriculture and animal husbandry. The map of Shahrekord city is indicated in figure 1.



Figure 1. Map of Shahrekord in Chaharmahal & Bakhtiari province

### Data collection procedure

The present ethnobotanical study was carried out using a questionnaire in Shahrekord. This study was conducted from April 2017 to February 2018 through face-to-face interviews using a questionnaire in 29 traditional therapists. The questionnaires that also included demographic characteristics items were distributed among traditional therapists. The interviewers referred to the therapists in person to elicit their pharmaceutical information and beliefs about phytotherapy. Out of 29 therapists, 8 were female and 21 male. Their level of education was from high school diploma to master's degree. The results of the questionnaires were meticulously tabulated. Data analysis was done by the Excel software. In this study, the frequency of plant use was calculated by the following formula:

Number of times the plant is used = (Number of people who have mentioned the plant effect divided by total number of people who filled out questionnaires)  $\times$  100




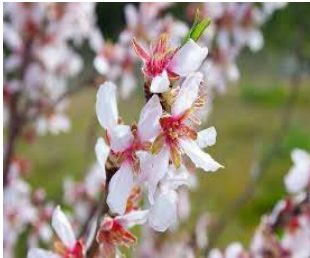


### Results

The results of this study showed that medicinal plants such as *Salvia hispanica*, *Descurainia sophia* (L.) Prantle., *Prunus amygdalus* L., *Echinops persicus* Stev. & Fisch., *Stachys lavandulifolia* and some other herb are traditionally used to treat constipation. Additional information is shown in Table 1. Figure, frequency of rate, number of plant organs used, and number of plant families with anti-constipation effect are indicated in Tables 2–4.







Table 1. Ethnobotanical data on constipation drugs for infants and children in Shahrekord

| Scientific name                                | Herbal name    | Local name    | Used organs              | Effect            |
|--|----------------|---------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Salvia hispanica</i>                        | Lamiaceae      | Tokhmsharbat  | Seed                     | Anti-constipation |
| <i>Descurainia sophia</i> (L.) Prantle.        | Brassicaceae   | Khakeshir     | Seed                     | Anti-constipation |
| <i>Rumex pulcher</i> L.                        | Polygonaceae   | Torshak       | Leaf, root, stem, flower | Anti-constipation |
| <i>Alyssum</i> spp. Stead. Ex Boiss.           | Brassicaceae   | Ghodoumeh     | Leaf, seed               | Anti-constipation |
| <i>Prunus amygdalus</i> L.                     | Rosaceae       | Badam         | Fruit, resin             | Anti-constipation |
| <i>Astragalus adscendens</i> Bross. & Hausskn. | Fabaceae       | Gazangabin    | Resin                    | Anti-constipation |
| <i>Echinops persicus</i> Stev. & Fisch.        | Asteraceae     | Shekartiqal   | Fruit                    | Anti-constipation |
| <i>Plantago major</i> L.                       | Plantaginaceae | Esfarzeh      | Seed                     | Anti-constipation |
| <i>Rheum ribes</i> L.                          | Polygonaceae   | Rivas         | Leaf, flower, stem       | Anti-constipation |
| <i>Stachys lavandulifolia</i>                  | Lamiaceae      | Chaye kouhi   | Aerial organs            | Anti-constipation |
| <i>Plantago major</i>                          | Plantaginaceae | Barhang       | Aerial organs            | Anti-constipation |
| <i>Alcea</i> spp.                              | Malvaceae      | Gole khatmi   | Flower                   | Anti-constipation |
| <i>Glycyrrhiza glabra</i> L.                   | Fabaceae       | Shirin bayan  | Root                     | Anti-constipation |
| <i>Peganum harmala</i> L.                      | Zygophyllaceae | Espand        | Seed, leaf               | Anti-constipation |
| <i>Pistachia atlanta</i> Desf.                 | Anacardiaceae  | Pesteye kouhi | Fruit                    | Anti-constipation |
| <i>Prangos ferulacea</i> L.                    | Apiaceae       | Jashir        | Aerial organs            | Anti-constipation |

**Table 2.** Figure of medicinal plants and frequency rate

| Frequency rate                                 | Figure   | Scientific name |
|--|--|-----------------|
| <i>Ocimum basilicum</i>                        |    | 3%              |
| <i>Descurainia sophia</i> (L.) Prantle.        |    | 13%             |
| <i>Rumex pulcher</i> L.                        |   | 3%              |
| <i>Prunus amygdalus</i> L.                     |  | 3%              |
| <i>Astragalus adscendens</i> Bioss. & Hausskn. |  | 3%              |
| <i>Echinops persicus</i> Stev. & Fisch.        |  | 13%             |



| Frequency rate                | Figure   | Scientific name |
|-------------------------------|--|-----------------|
| <i>Plantago major</i> L.      |    | 34%             |
| <i>Rheum ribes</i> L.         |    | 6%              |
| <i>Stachys lavandulifolia</i> |   | 10%             |
| <i>Plantago major</i>         |  | 10%             |
| <i>Glycyrrhiza glabra</i> L.  |  | 17%             |
| <i>Peganum harmala</i> L.     |  | 6%              |



| Frequency rate                 | Figure   | Scientific name |
|--------------------------------|--|-----------------|
| <i>Pistachia atlanta</i> Desf. |  | 3%              |
| <i>Prangos ferulacea</i> L.    |  | 3%              |

Table 3. Number of herbal family

| Scientific name | Herbal name |
|-----------------|-------------|
| Lamiaceae       | 2           |
| Brassicaceae    | 2           |
| Polygonaceae    | 2           |
| Rosaceae        | 1           |
| Fabaceae        | 2           |
| Asteraceae      | 1           |
| Plantaginaceae  | 2           |
| Malvaceae       | 1           |
| Zygophyllaceae  | 1           |
| Anacardiaceae   | 1           |
| Apiaceae        | 1           |

Table 4. Number of plant organs used

| Used organs   | Number |
|---------------|--------|
| Seed          | 5      |
| Leaves        | 4      |
| Root          | 2      |
| Stem          | 2      |
| Flower        | 3      |
| Fruit         | 3      |
| Aerial organs | 3      |
| Resin         | 1      |
| Oil           | 1      |

Discussion

Constipation, characterized by various bowel symptoms including having hard stool, difficulties in passing stool and an unpleasant feeling of incomplete stool evacuation, is an unpleasant problem that can make life bitter and annoying. When one has constipation and is suffering from flatulence, the only thing he/she thinks is a quick recovery. Individuals may develop constipation in different ways depending on their physical system. Various causes of constipation usually limit its clinical efficacy of the conventional treatments. Medicinal plant usually have mul-

tifunction properties [22-28]. The shortcomings of the current treatments can be completed by medicinal plants which not only are able to target multiple organs of the body but also can reduce their toxic effects [29-33]. Most laxative medicinal plants have substances such as anthraquinones which stimulate the intestines. A laxative usually works by drawing in fluid to colon and enhancing peristalsis which is intestinal contraction helping the motivation of materials through the colon to the rectum. The use of fluids and fiber is essential to remove constipation. Medicinal plants usually have high level of fluid and fiber which can help these patients. Chronic constipation increases the body level of

oxidative stress [34]. Oxidative stress is one of the causes of a wide range of diseases [35-43]. Therefore, patients with constipation who suffer from other diseases may benefit further from these plants. It should be noted that medicinal plants have been used since ancient times and their safety a lot of them has been approved [44]. However, they also should be used with caution because they may have toxic effects, although they may even reduce the toxic effects of other compounds [45-48].

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## Authors' contribution

All authors contributed equally to the manuscript.

## Conflicts of interest

The authors declared no competing interests.

## Ethical considerations

Ethical issues (including plagiarism, data fabrication, double publication and etc.) have been completely observed by author.

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