LAXATIVES

* Laxatives are classified as **bulk-forming, lubricant, emollient, osmotic, or stimulant** types. Most act on fluid transport mechanisms and colonic motor stimulation. They should be *avoided in the presence of dehydration*.
* **Bulk-forming laxatives** are *added to the diet*. These products are dietary fiber supplements of poorly digestible polysaccharides and celluloses derived principally from cereal grains, wheat bran, and psyllium. *They absorb water, soften feces, add bulk, stretch the colonic smooth muscle, and improve contractility*. Many constipated cats respond to dietary supplementation with one of these products. Dietary fiber is preferable because it is well tolerated, more effective, and more physiologic than other laxatives. Commercial fiber-supplemented diets are available, or the pet owner may add psyllium (1–4 tsp/meal), wheat bran (1–2 tbsp/meal), or pumpkin (1–4 tbsp/meal) to canned food. Animals should be well hydrated before starting fiber supplementation to minimize the potential for impaction of fiber in the constipated colon.

* **Emollient laxatives** are anionic detergents that *increase the miscibility of water and lipids in digesta, thereby enhancing lipid absorption and impairing water absorption*. DSS and disoctyl calcium sulfosuccinate are emollient laxatives available in oral and enema form. Docusate sodium (cats: 50-mg capsule, sid; dogs: 50-mg capsule, 1–4/day) and docusate calcium (cats: 50-mg capsule, 1–2/day; dogs: 50-mg capsule, 2–3/day) are other examples of emollient laxatives.

* Mineral oil and white petroleum are **lubricant laxatives** that *impede colonic water absorption and permit greater ease of fecal passage*. These effects are moderate, and lubricant laxatives are beneficial only in mild cases of constipation. Mineral oil use should be limited to rectal administration because of the risk of aspiration pneumonia with oral administration.

* **Hyperosmotic laxatives** consist of poorly absorbed polysaccharides (eg, lactulose, 0.5 mL/kg, PO, bid-tid), magnesium salts (eg, magnesium citrate, magnesium hydroxide, magnesium sulfate), and the polyethylene glycols. Lactulose is the most effective agent of this group. The organic acids produced from lactulose fermentation *stimulate colonic fluid secretion and propulsive motility.* Lactulose osmotically retains water in the bowel to soften fecal material. It is also useful in management of hepatic encephalopathy because it decreases luminal pH, reduces the bacterial production of ammonia, and favors the formation of ammonium ions that are poorly absorbed. Stimulant laxative products (eg, bisacodyl [cats and small dogs: 5 mg; medium-sized dogs: 10 mg; large dogs: 15–20 mg]) increase the propulsive activity of the bowel. They are contraindicated in the presence of bowel obstruction.