

# No Panacea for Diarrhea

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Diarrhea can be caused by a variety of etiologies including bacteria, parasites, virus, inflammatory, ischemic and functional. There is no panacea for all types of diarrhea. Several symptom-relieving agents for diarrhea such as Questran, imodia and loperamide cannot be used as panacea for diarrhea. Improper use of these agents can sometimes lead to worsening of underlying disorders. Here are several examples of improper use of these agents.

A 70-year-old woman came to my clinic complaining of abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting and passing blood in the stool after taking Questran (Cholestyramine, welchol or colestid) prescribed by her primary care provider (PCP). She has had diarrhea for several years, the cause of which has not been identified with proper work-up. She has been treated with different anti-diarrhea medications without any success. The Questran did stop her diarrhea and actually caused constipation, however she developed more abdominal pain with nausea, vomiting and bloody stool. I stopped her Questran and did proper work-up including colonoscopy. She was diagnosed with ischemic colitis. Proper treatment was initiated and her symptoms resolved.

A 60-year-old woman has diarrhea for several years which was well controlled with Questran. She was happy with the treatment because this medication keeps her away from diarrhea. The etiology for her diarrhea was not clear and no proper work-up was done. She was told that she has to take Questran for the rest of her life. She came to my clinic for screening colonoscopy. I did biopsy of her colon during colonoscopy as part of her diarrhea work-up. Microscopic colitis was diagnosed. She was treated with proper anti-inflammatory medication. Her diarrhea resolved in 6 months. She does not have to take Questran for the rest of her life.

A 50-year-old man came to my clinic for 2<sup>nd</sup> opinion about his diarrhea. He developed diarrhea about 4 weeks ago and his PCP prescribed him with Questran. His diarrhea was initially well-controlled but he found Questran becoming less and less effective over time. He developed abdominal pain with nausea, vomiting and generalized weakness. I did comprehensive diarrhea work-up. His diarrhea was caused by ***Clostridium difficile***, a potentially lethal infectious colitis. A proper antibiotic was prescribed and his diarrhea resolved.

The above cases demonstrate that a proper work-up is extremely important before prescribing a “panacea” (Questran) for all diarrhea. A minimum work-up is to rule out potentially lethal infectious diseases. Improper use of the “panacea” can delay the correct diagnosis or even worse, may cause severe damage to the health of the patients. If you have any questions about diarrhea, please contact Dr. Jeff Ye, North Atlanta Medical & Digestive Care at 770-346-0900. We can help!