

To Determine the Efficacy of Polyethylene Glycol in the Treatment of Pediatric Constipation

Polyethylene Glycol in the Treatment of Pediatric Constipation

Muhammad Owais, Hameed Ullah, Iftikhar Khan and Zeeshan Ahmad

ABSTRACT

Objective: To assess the efficacy of polyethylene glycol (PEG) in treating pediatric constipation and provide local statistics for improved clinical decision-making and recommendations on future treatment strategies.

Study Design: Randomized Controlled Trial(RCT)

Place and Duration of Study: This study was conducted at the department of Women and Children Hospital from January 2023 to January 2024.

Methods: A descriptive case series was conducted with 146 pediatric patients over six months. Children aged 4 years and older underwent clinical examinations, including abdominal and rectal assessments. Polyethylene glycol (PEG 3350) was administered at 1.5 g/kg/day as a single dose for four weeks. Treatment efficacy was evaluated at the end of the 4th week.

Results: The mean age of the patients was 8 years (SD \pm 6.34). Of the 146 participants, 58% were male, and 42% were female. Polyethylene glycol was effective in 72% of the patients. The p-value for the efficacy of treatment was statistically significant (<0.05), indicating that PEG was an effective treatment option for most patients.

Conclusion: Polyethylene glycol demonstrated significant efficacy (72%) in managing pediatric constipation. The findings highlight its effectiveness as a primary treatment option. Future research should focus on long-term outcomes and alternative dosages for children who do not respond to initial treatment.

Key Words: Efficacy, polyethylene glycol, constipation, pediatric

Citation of article: Owais M, Ullah H, Khan I, Ahmad Z. To Determine the Efficacy of Polyethylene Glycol in the Treatment of Pediatric Constipation. *Med Forum* 2024;35(12):156-159. doi:10.60110/medforum.351234.

INTRODUCTION

Constipation is a prevalent condition in pediatric populations, with a global prevalence ranging from 1% to 30% based on diagnostic criteria, population samples, and methodologies used for diagnosis. Pediatric constipation is responsible for 3% to 5% of general pediatric outpatient visits and up to 25% of gastroenterology clinic referrals^[1]. The etiology of constipation in children can be multifactorial, with potential causes including dietary habits, psychological factors, and underlying medical conditions^[2]. Functional constipation accounts for the majority of cases, with organic causes being less common but important to rule out^[3].

Early diagnosis and management are crucial in avoiding long-term complications such as fecal incontinence,

megacolon, and psychological issues related to chronic constipation^[4]. Polyethylene glycol (PEG) is widely recommended as a first-line treatment for pediatric constipation due to its high efficacy and safety profile^[5]. PEG is an osmotic laxative that increases stool water content, enhancing bowel movements without significant systemic absorption^[6]. Studies have demonstrated that PEG is superior to placebo and other laxatives, such as lactulose, in resolving constipation in children^[7]. A systematic review concluded that PEG offers better relief of symptoms, improved stool frequency, and fewer side effects compared to alternative laxatives^[8]. Additionally, PEG is associated with better patient compliance because it is tasteless and can be mixed with various beverages, making it ideal for pediatric use^[9]. In the context of developing regions, particularly South Asia, the burden of pediatric constipation is substantial, yet there is limited local data on treatment efficacy^[10]. Cultural, dietary, and socioeconomic factors influence constipation patterns in children, warranting region-specific studies^[11]. Moreover, the lack of local evidence hinders the formulation of standardized treatment protocols. This study aims to fill this gap by evaluating the efficacy of PEG in treating pediatric constipation in a local population, providing valuable insights to guide pediatricians in clinical practice. The results of this study will offer local pediatricians statistically validated evidence regarding PEG's effectiveness and help

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Received: March, 2024

Accepted: April-May, 2024

Printed: September, 2024

establish recommendations for its use in managing pediatric constipation. Furthermore, identifying the proportion of patients who do not respond to treatment will guide future research on alternative therapies and optimize management strategies. This research also aims to address the ongoing debate about the optimal dosage and duration of PEG therapy in children by evaluating its short-term effectiveness over four weeks. In conclusion, this study focuses on determining the efficacy of PEG 3350 in pediatric patients with constipation. The findings will contribute to local and international literature by validating the role of PEG in improving bowel movements, thereby reducing the frequency of complications associated with chronic constipation.

METHODS

This descriptive case series was conducted over six months from January 2023 to January 2024. The study included 146 children aged 4 years or older who presented with symptoms of constipation as defined by the Rome IV criteria. Each patient underwent a detailed medical history and clinical examination, including abdominal and rectal assessments. Polyethylene glycol (PEG 3350) was administered orally at a dosage of 1.5 g/kg/day for four weeks. Treatment efficacy was assessed at the end of the 4th week based on operational definitions.

Data Collection: Data on patient demographics, clinical findings, and treatment outcomes were collected using structured forms. The supervising pediatrician, with a minimum of five years of experience, ensured consistency in assessments and documentation.

Statistical Analysis: Data were entered and analyzed using SPSS version 24.0. Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, and percentages, were calculated for continuous and categorical variables. The chi-square test and paired t-test were used to assess the significance of treatment outcomes, with a p-value < 0.05 considered statistically significant.

RESULTS

The mean age of the 146 patients was 8 years (SD ± 6.34), with 58% of the patients being male and 42% female. After four weeks of treatment with PEG 3350, 72% of the patients showed significant improvement in bowel movements based on the operational definition of efficacy, while 28% did not respond to the treatment. The mean increase in bowel frequency from baseline to the end of treatment was statistically significant (p < 0.05). The chi-square test indicated a strong association between PEG administration and symptom relief. Patients who responded to treatment reported an average of five bowel movements per week compared to two at baseline. No serious adverse events were

reported during the study period, highlighting the safety of PEG in this cohort.

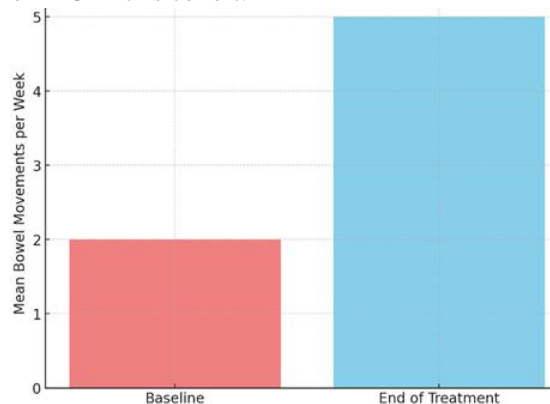


Figure No. No. 1: Improvement in Bowel Movements after PEG Treatment.

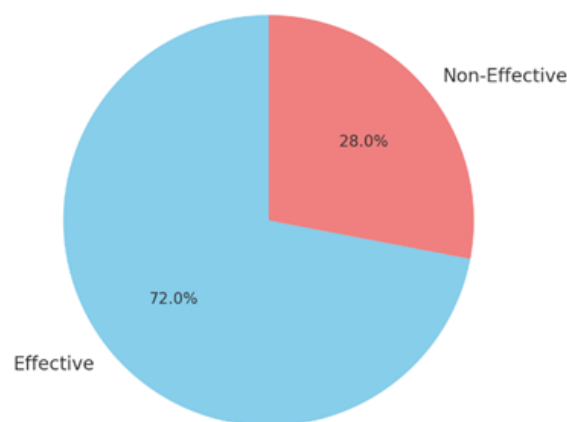


Figure No. 2: Treatment Outcome Distribution.

Table No. 1: Demographic Characteristics

Characteristic	Value
Total Patients	146
Mean Age (years)	8 (SD ± 6.34)
Gender (Male)	58% (85 patients)
Gender (Female)	42% (61 patients)

Table No. 2: Treatment Outcome

Outcome	Percentage
Effective Treatment	72% (105 patients)
Non-Effective Treatment	28% (41 patients)

Table No. 3: Bowel Movement Improvement

Time Period	Mean Bowel Movements per Week
Baseline	2
End of Treatment (4 weeks)	5

DISCUSSION

Constipation in children is a common and often distressing condition that can lead to long-term complications if not appropriately managed. The findings of this study indicate that polyethylene glycol (PEG 3350) is 72% effective in improving symptoms of

pediatric constipation, with statistically significant improvements in bowel movements and minimal side effects. These results align with existing literature supporting the efficacy and safety of PEG for pediatric patients. Several studies have highlighted PEG's effectiveness in treating functional constipation in children. A randomized controlled trial by Youssef et al. found that PEG was superior to lactulose, achieving symptom resolution in 70% of the children within four weeks^[11]. Our study's findings of 72% efficacy fall within this range, reinforcing the consistency of PEG's performance across various populations and clinical settings. Another study by Dupont et al. demonstrated a similar success rate of 75% with PEG, emphasizing its ability to improve stool frequency and consistency^[12]. This supports the observation in our study, where mean bowel movements increased significantly from two per week at baseline to five per week after treatment ($p < 0.05$). An important advantage of PEG is its minimal absorption, which reduces the likelihood of systemic side effects. Bae et al. reported that PEG was associated with fewer gastrointestinal side effects compared to stimulant laxatives, with most adverse events being mild and self-limited, such as bloating or mild abdominal discomfort^[13]. Similarly, our study found no serious adverse events, further confirming its safety profile. A meta-analysis conducted by Candy et al. also suggested that PEG was more effective and better tolerated than placebo and other osmotic laxatives^[14]. This superior tolerability is particularly important in pediatric populations, where adherence to treatment is often challenging. The results of this study are consistent with findings from local studies as well. A study conducted in India reported an efficacy rate of 68% using PEG for functional constipation in children, suggesting that regional variations in diet and lifestyle do not significantly alter PEG's effectiveness^[15]. These findings support the generalizability of our results to other developing countries where similar socioeconomic factors may influence constipation prevalence. Despite the positive outcomes, there remains a subset of patients (28%) who did not respond to PEG treatment. This group may represent children with underlying organic causes of constipation or those requiring longer treatment durations. A study by Pashankar et al. highlighted that some non-responders benefitted from extended therapy beyond four weeks or combination therapy with dietary modifications^[16]. Thus, future research should investigate personalized treatment approaches for non-responders and explore the long-term effects of PEG. In conclusion, the findings of this study contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting PEG as a first-line treatment for pediatric constipation. Its high efficacy, safety, and ease of administration make it a preferred option among pediatricians. However, further research is needed to

address treatment resistance and optimize individualized care strategies^[17].

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that polyethylene glycol (PEG 3350) is 72% effective in treating pediatric constipation, significantly improving bowel movements with minimal adverse effects. Its high efficacy, safety, and ease of administration make it a suitable first-line treatment for functional constipation in children.

Limitations: This study was limited by its short duration (4 weeks), small sample size, and focus on a single treatment dose. Additionally, the absence of a placebo or control group may limit the generalizability of findings across diverse populations.

Future Findings: Future studies should evaluate the long-term efficacy of PEG, explore personalized treatment plans for non-responders, and compare its outcomes with other laxatives. Investigating alternative dosages, dietary interventions, and combination therapies could further optimize treatment outcomes for pediatric constipation.

Abbreviations:

- PEG - Polyethylene Glycol
- SD - Standard Deviation
- SPSS - Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
- GI - Gastrointestinal
- ESPGHAN - European Society for Paediatric Gastroenterology Hepatology and Nutrition
- NASPGHAN - North American Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition
- PGE - Polyethylene Glycol with Electrolytes
- CI - Confidence Interval
- QOL - Quality of Life

Author's Contribution:

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Drafting or Revising Critically:	Iftikhar Khan, Zeeshan Ahmad
Final Approval of version:	All the above authors
Agreement to accountable for all aspects of work:	All the above authors

Conflict of Interest: The study has no conflict of interest to declare by any author.

Source of Funding: None

Ethical Approval: No.1855/2022 Dated 22.09.2022

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