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Melanosis Coli

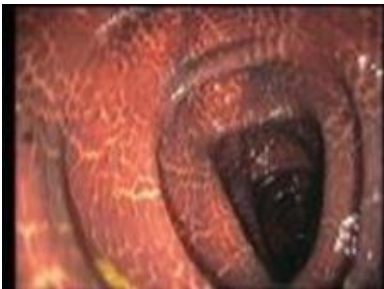
What is melanosis coli?

Melanosis coli is a condition almost always associated with chronic laxative use in which dark pigment is deposited in the lining of the colon. The lining of the colon is changed from a healthy pink to a dark brownish gray or black discoloration. Generally, melanosis coli is a benign condition that does not result in serious disease. However, it can significantly worsen constipation and lead to a dependency on laxatives.



Normal Colon

The colon has a very unique lining that contains cells that allow water to pass through them in either direction depending on the consistency of the stool. If the stool is liquid, the lining will allow water to be absorbed. Conversely, if the stool is too hard and dry, fluid will be released so that the stool can be easily passed through the intestines. When a patient has melanosis coli the cells in the lining of the colon have been damaged and cannot balance the fluid needs of the colon. This results in constipation and in very severe cases, obstruction of the bowel, which can be a medical emergency.



Melanosis

What causes melanosis coli?

Melanosis coli usually results from chronic use of anthranoid laxatives. Anthranoid laxatives that contain stimulants like senna, cassia senna, cassia angustifolia, cassia acutifolia and should be used with extreme caution and only sparingly.

How is melanosis coli diagnosed?

Melanosis coli can be diagnosed by direct visualization of the colon lining during colonoscopy or by examining a biopsy (small tissue sample) of the colon lining under a microscope.

What is the prognosis (outcome) of melanosis coli?

If a person completely stops using stimulant laxatives, the changes associated with melanosis coli lessen over time and may disappear. The key is to use only natural bulk agents like Metamucil and Citrucel, consume a high fiber diet, exercise and drink plenty of fluids.