

Chapter 13 — Mineral Oil—Petrolatum

from *Constipation: How to Cure Yourself* (1925)

by William S. Sadler, M.D., F.A.C.S.

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Sources for Chapter 13, in the order in which they first appear

- (1) Charles M. **Campbell** associated with Albert K. **Detwiller**, M.D., *The Lazy Colon* (New York: The Educational Press, 1924)
- (2) John Harvey **Kellogg**, M.D., LL.D., F.A.C.S., *Colon Hygiene, Revised Edition* (Battle Creek, Michigan: The Modern Medicine Publishing Co., 1923)

Key

- (a) **Green** indicates where a source author first appears, or where he/she reappears.
- (b) **Yellow** highlights most parallelisms.
- (c) **Tan** highlights parallelisms not occurring on the same row, or parallelisms separated by yellowed parallelisms.
- (d) An underlined word or words indicates where the source and Sadler pointedly differ from one another.
- (e) **Bold type** indicates passages which Sadler copied verbatim, or nearly verbatim, from an uncited source.
- (f) **Pink** indicates passages where Sadler specifically shares his own experiences, opinions, advice, etc.
- (g) **Light blue** indicates passages which strongly resemble something in the Urantia Book, or which allude to the Urantia phenomenon.
- (h) **Red** indicates an obvious mistake, in most cases brought about by Sadler's miscopying or misunderstanding his source.

XIII: MINERAL OIL— PETROLATUM

XX: MINERAL OIL AS A LAXATIVE (Campbell&Detwiller 134)

[contd] The *Journal of the American Medical Association* for Nov. 22, 1919, says through a staff writer that the rapidity with which “mineral oil” (petrolatum)

has conquered the globe has been phenomenal (C&D 134).

Petrolatum is a bland, odorless, tasteless and colorless liquid, indigestible

as well as incapable of decomposition by bacteria; hence it cannot become rancid.

It is not absorbed,

therefore it cannot produce poisoning in any dose (C&D 134).

Wherever it is desired to soften the feces petrolatum is indicated. To speak of this action as lubrication is hardly correct.

13:0.1 PETROLATUM—commonly called mineral oil

and also known as paraffin oil—

is a substance quite generally used well-nigh over the face of the civilized globe at the present time.

It is a bland, odorless, tasteless, colorless liquid, wholly indigestible;

cannot be acted upon by bacteria,

and is in every sense an ideal substance to use as a laxative.

It is not absorbed by any part of the digestive canal,

and therefore it cannot produce any serious effect no matter how large the dose.

13:0.2 It is hardly correct to speak of the effect of mineral oil as a lubrication.

It does not become spread about in such a manner as to

SOURCE

Lubrication depends upon the formation of an oil film such as it is impossible to apply to a water-soaked membrane (C&D 134).

[It prevents the drying of the feces ... (Kellogg 396).]

[Compare: Mineral oil is useful as a mild laxative, and does not produce any bad after results (William S. Sadler, M.D. and Lena K. Sadler, M.D., *The Mother and Her Child* [1916], p. 98).]

Another special advantage the oil has is that

the beneficial effects are not diminished by continued use

as is the case with any other laxative (C&D 135).

When an excess is used it generally gives rise to the much complained of leak, which may occur even with small doses (C&D 134).

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produce a film over the intestines,

but it does serve to prevent undue drying out of the feces.

13:0.3 Mineral oil can safely be used by pregnant women, the nursing mother, and can also be given to children.

HOW MINERAL OIL ACTS

13:1.1 The interesting thing about mineral oil is that

it does not seem to form a habit.

That is, you do not have to take more and more of it,

as in the case of ordinary laxatives, to get the desired result.

13:1.2 An experience of several years in the use of mineral oil has taught us that the remedy is quite curious in its action. There are patients who react to it regularly and promptly; and I have seen this favorable action especially in patients whose passages were hard, dry, and insufficient in amount. But there are other patients with whom the effect at first is most promising, but this quickly lessens and finally ceases altogether.

In other individuals,

the oil, without producing any stools, leaks away,

SOURCE

[The patient is often unconscious of the escape until it is noted that the clothing is badly soiled (Kellogg 407).]

BATHS AND HOME TREATMENTS (Kellogg 367)

Paraffin oil will not remedy every defect in the defecating process and hence will not cure every case of constipation,

but it comes nearer being a panacea than any remedy which has heretofore been found,

and does meet a surprisingly large number of indications (K 396-97).

[Hemorrhoids] are usually the result of constipation ... By the habitual use of paraffin, the stools are made soft, straining is avoided ... and thus the diseased tissues are readily healed (K 405).

XX: MINERAL OIL AS A LAXATIVE (Campbell&Detwiller 134)

The use of half an ounce of paraffin at bedtime and half as much more *an hour before each meal*

will generally in a few days change a putrefactive condition completely (C&D 135).

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much to the patient's discomfort, soiling his linen and bed.

This can be prevented in many cases by taking the oil in smaller doses several times during the day. Many patients do well on mineral oil even when they use it only twice or three times a week.

13:1.3 Is mineral oil a curative remedy? Probably not.

I have never observed a permanent effect in the sense that a complete restoration of the bowel functions is obtained after the use of the oil alone.

But of all temporary expedients¹—mineral oil is undoubtedly the most harmless remedy to employ.

13:1.4 Mineral oil is very helpful in bringing about loose bowel action in case of hemorrhoids.

One-half ounce taken at bedtime and one-half ounce before each meal

will serve to bring about a great change in the average case of constipation.

HOW TO ADMINISTER MINERAL OIL

An investigation of mineral oil was made under the auspices of the American Medical Association and a report published March 6, 1915 ... from which it is seen that the committee started its work by collecting three kinds of liquid petrolatum: A light “Russian” oil; a heavy “Russian” oil, and an American oil ... From eight clinical reports submitted the following conclusions were drawn:

Dosage.—Half an ounce to three ounces a day.

In the same patient the same amount of each of the oils was required (C&D 136).

Summary.—So far as the therapeutic (remedial) results are concerned the differences in the action of the three varieties of oil are too slight to be of important (C&D 136).

Frequency of dose.—The same amount daily seemed as efficient

when given in one dose as when given in divided doses two or three times a day (C&D 136).

13:2.1 1. *Dose*. Half an ounce to three ounces a day.

In the same patient the same amount of the different kinds of oils is required.

There seems to be little or no difference between the influences of the various oils.

Heavy oil or light oil—American or Russian—the effects are about the same.

In small children mineral oil is a splendid constipation remedy and should be given in doses of one teaspoonful two or three times a day.

13:2.2 2. *Frequency of dose*. The same amount daily seems as efficient

(in most cases)

when given in one dose as when given in divided doses two or three times a day.

Breaking up the dose sometimes prevents “leakage.”

SOURCE

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Effectiveness.—

To produce one or two copious stools a day the required dose varied considerably ...

but there was no difference on account of the specific gravity or characters of the oils (C&D 136).

[contd] Character of stools.—They were soft, usually formed, sometimes not, obviously greasy.

They had a peculiar odor described as sour.

Their consistency varied with the dose but was the same for the different kinds of oil (C&D 136).

From these findings it would appear that

a satisfactory standard of the U.S. Pharmacopeia might permit the use of Russian or American oil, if suitably refined (C&D 136).

As a rule, it is best taken between meals, but not always. When used in a single dose, most patients prefer to take their allowance in the evening, just before retiring.

13:2.3 3. *Results.*

By regulating the amount and frequency of the dose, one or more copious stools a day can be produced.

The stools are, as a general rule, soft, usually formed, sometimes not, obviously greasy.

They have a peculiar odor described as sour.

Their consistency varies with the dose but is the same for the different kinds of oil.

13:2.4 4. *Special preparations.* Scores of special brands of mineral oil may be purchased at the drug store. As far as the therapeutic results are concerned these various paraffin preparations are all about the same. American oil is just as efficacious as the Russian oil.

Let us, therefore, emphasize the fact that

you do not have to buy the extensively and expensively advertised brands,

the U. S. Pharmacopeia preparation is equally effective—

SOURCE

13: CONSTIPATION

[?]

and costs very much less.

13:2.5 Mineral oil can be flavored by any of the essential oils—peppermint, cardamon, etc. It can also be administered in water, lemonade, and orangeade.

OBJECTIONS TO MINERAL OIL

BATHS AND HOME TREATMENTS (Kellogg 367)

Objectionable Features of Paraffin (Kellogg 406)

1. An unpleasant oily taste

which to some people is so disagreeable as to produce nausea and loss of appetite (K 406).

The difficulty of taking paraffin the writer succeeded in overcoming in part by

preparing a heavy emulsion by the use of gum acacia (K 407).

13:3.1 Mineral oil does not agree with everyone. Some patients, particularly those persons who suffer from gastric stagnation, experience

a very unpleasant oily taste,

so much that it may produce even nausea, and in some cases it spoils the appetite.

Vomiting is occasionally produced.

Such persons may find it possible to take some of the proprietary preparations of mineral oil

that are modified or treated by the addition of some substance, such as gum acacia.

But it is fortunate that the vast majority of persons take mineral oil without an objection.

SOURCE

13: CONSTIPATION

13:3.2 In some patients there seems to be a tendency for

3. Paraffin oil is so limpid that it readily finds its way to the rectum ahead of the other bowel contents,

this oil to travel its own route through the bowel.

It doesn't seem to mix up with the food to any great extent,

[2. A disposition to separate from the other intestinal contents. It usually appears as a brown oily liquid separated from the rest of the stool and sometimes the separation is so marked that the stools are very ragged and consist of **hard** lumps smeared with brown oil (K 406).]

and while the stool remains more or less **hardened**,

and very easily escapes, either with or without the expulsion of flatus (K 406-07).

the oil is expelled from the bowel in considerable quantities at one time,

and thus it fails to accomplish the purpose for which it was administered.

This defect is probably best remedied by taking the oil in smaller doses throughout the day, say a tablespoonful before each meal, and one or two before retiring at night.

13:3.3 In other cases, as has already been noted, there is a tendency to leakage, and we think this is best prevented by likewise taking the oil in three or four smaller doses throughout the day. While, as a rule, the oil does best when administered before meals, we have found sometimes leakage is best prevented by taking the oil with the meal or at the close of the meal.

XX: MINERAL OIL AS A LAXATIVE
(**Campbell&Detwiller** 134)

13:3.4 *Anthracene*. In recent years attention has been called to

SOURCE

It has long been known that the workmen engaged in paraffin works are especially subject to cancer. A commission appointed by the British Government to make a special study of the subject showed by the report of its specialist, Dr. H. C. Ross, of the Lister Institute, London,

that paraffin oil contains substances associated with anthracene (a hydrocarbon derived from coal tar),

which are believed to be, under favorable circumstances, capable of producing cancer (C&D 135).

*As to the English Medical Commission that investigated the increase of cancer among those who work in paraffin, the fact of such increase seems well established. It is not thought paraffin oil that has been purified by reputable firms is dangerous (C&D 136, fn)

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a report rendered by a commission appointed by the British Government to make a study of alleged frequency of cancer among the workmen of paraffin establishments.

This commission decided that paraffin oil does contain a certain substance (anthracene)

which seems to set up an irritation that predisposes to cancer,

but it is not believed by any who have made a study of this question that refined paraffin oils, such as are put out by reliable concerns, would contain any of this substance or would be in any way dangerous as a predisposing influence toward cancer.

SUMMARY OF EFFECTS

BATHS AND HOME TREATMENTS (Kellogg 367)

Mineral Oil (Kellogg 395)

After a careful study of its effect in several thousand cases,

13:5.1 From those who have had the largest experience in observing the effects of mineral oil when administered in the treatment of constipation

and from our own experience,

SOURCE

the writer feels justified in saying with much confidence that paraffin oil

may be relied upon to accomplish the following results in the treatment of chronic constipation:

1. It lubricates the alimentary canal throughout its whole length.

In a large number of cases of constipation there is an excessive absorption of water from the colon, leaving the feces dry or pasty and adhesive (K 397).

The use of half an ounce or an ounce of paraffin oil at bedtime, and half as much an hour before each meal,

will in two or three days change the condition completely, as shown by proctoscopic examination (K 397).

2. This mechanical lubricating action of paraffin is highly important in overcoming kinks due to redundance or to adhesions resulting from colitis or other causes (K 397).

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we are warranted in concluding that mineral oil,

when used for this purpose,

may be relied upon to bring about the following results:

13:5.2 1. *Lubrication.*

It lubricates the digestive tract through its entire length,

using this term “lubrication” in the manner already noted.

In this way

the accumulation of large quantities of dried or adhesive feces

is prevented.

An ounce of paraffin oil at bedtime with one-half ounce before each meal,²

is an efficient preventive of this condition in the majority of patients.

13:5.3 2. *Obstructions.*

Mineral oil probably assists the food mass in negotiating certain partial obstructions, kinks, folds, obstructing bands, etc.,

or in getting by areas of spastic colonic contraction.

SOURCE

3 ... The concentrated diet of our modern civilized life contains so little indigestible material that the residue forms a pasty mass which tends to adhere to the intestinal wall.... When delay occurs, the further absorption of water

converts these pasty residues into hard masses, scybala ... (K 397).

5. ... Observations, in a large number of cases, made by Dr. J. T. Case, Roentgenologist at the Battle Creek Sanitarium, have shown that paraffin oil greatly accelerates the passage of material through the small as well as the large intestine.

This action is exceedingly important in those forms of intestinal toxemia which depend upon iliac stasis, by far the most serious of all forms of stasis.

Stagnation in the small intestine is of far greater importance than stasis in the colon, for the reason that both putrefaction and absorption are much more active in this part of the digestive tube than in the large intestine (K 399-400).

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These delays favor the undue absorption of moisture

and it is in this way that mineral oil generally comes to the rescue by preventing

that solidification of the food mass,

which inevitably results from the excessive absorption of water in the colon.

13:5.4 3. *Small intestine.*

Paraffin oil is also believed by Case³ and others to facilitate the passage of food through the small intestine

and it is of special value therefore in those cases where there is stasis of the small bowel,

accompanied by harmful putrefaction.

SOURCE

13: CONSTIPATION

13:5.5 4. *Toxin solvent.*

6. One of the most interesting features of the many-sided useful activities of paraffin, is its behavior toward intestinal toxins.

[[I]t was found that when paraffin oil was shaken with a water solution of indol, more than half the indol was quickly taken up by the paraffin (K 401).]

These toxins consist, not only of bile acids and alkaline wastes excreted by the intestinal mucous membrane,

but in addition, of a great variety of ptomaines and toxins produced through bacterial action ... (K 400).

Paraffin is a highly active solvent, and readily dissolves these waste and poisonous substances,

many of which are more soluble in paraffin oil than in water (K 400-01).

The result is that the paraffin oil, itself not absorbable,

takes up a very considerable portion of toxins found present in the intestinal tract,

and thus prevents their absorption (K 401).

Since it is known that

many of the toxic elements of the bowel,

including indol

and some of the bile acids and other alkaline wastes,

as well as toxins of microbic origin,

may be taken up by mineral oil, this new constipation remedy has acquired additional value in the eyes of physicians.

Paraffin oil is a highly active solvent for many of these waste products.

In fact, it is now known that

it will hold more of them in solution than will water,

and since mineral oil itself is not absorbable,

and further, since it can hold so many toxins in solution,

it becomes a valuable agent to prevent these substances from irritating the bowel or from being absorbed.

SOURCE

13: CONSTIPATION

13:5.6 5. *Colitis.*

7. Paraffin oil serves a useful purpose in protecting the mucous membrane when it is in an irritated state, as in cases of chronic colitis.

The value of petrolatum and other neutral petroleum products as a dressing for wounds is well known.

Paraffin acts in an equally favorable way upon irritated mucous surfaces (K 401-02).

9 ... Laxatives of all sorts increase the spasticity of the intestine, and so aggravate the constipation which they are given to receive (K 402-03).

Paraffin

lubricates and protects the sensitive surface of the spastic bowel, and at the same time softens the intestinal contents so as to permit passage through the bowel without mechanical irritation (K 403).

11. In all cases in which the stagnation of the small intestine is due to spasm of the ileocecal valve, induced by chronic appendicitis, ovarian irritation or inflammation, colitis, or possibly painful rectal disease through reflex irritation; paraffin proves itself to be an invaluable remedy ... (K 404).

In cases of intestinal irritation, colitis, etc., mineral oil serves the useful purpose of partially protecting the irritated bowel,

just as an oily dressing would protect a wound or an abraded skin surface,

and in this way it is of further assistance in the prevention of the absorption of injurious toxins by these irritated bowel surfaces.

It should be remembered that

laxatives and drastic purges serve further to irritate the colon,

whereas paraffin oil

assists in moving the food mass along with a minimum of irritation to the tender and sensitive bowel tract.

13:5.7 6. *Chronic inflammation.*

Mineral oil is valuable in all cases of constipation due to irritation, not only in colitis, but where there is chronic appendicitis, ovarian inflammation, gall-bladder irritation, etc.

SOURCE

10. ... Medical laxatives increase the antiperistalsis by which the reflux from the colon into the small intestine is increased. Case has shown by X-ray examination that paraffin increases the motility of the small intestine,

while it does not increase antiperistalsis (K 403-04).

12. The regular use of paraffin oil very generally relieves hemorrhoids and fissure, even when of some years' standing. These morbid conditions are usually the result of constipation, and are maintained and aggravated by straining at stool.

Since adopting the use of paraffin, the author has found that

the number of cases in which operation for hemorrhoids is needed is greatly reduced (K 405).

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Mineral oil seems to increase peristalsis in the small bowel to a maximum degree

with but a minimum of that tendency to anti-peristalsis which is sometimes produced by laxatives and cathartics.

13:5.8 7. Hemorrhoids and fissures.

Paraffin oil is of great value in those cases of constipation that are complicated by hemorrhoids, fissures,

and other painful conditions about the rectum.

In fact,

it has been our observation that since mineral oil has come into more general use,

we are meeting with fewer and fewer cases of hemorrhoids—

such as were formerly produced by excessive straining.

1. While it is merely of **temporary** value in habitual chronic constipation and possibly may still further increase the intestinal sluggishness by lessening the amount of intestinal exercise, it seems to have an actual curative effect in certain conditions, as, for instance, in spastic constipation ... (C&D 134).
 2. Sadler said essentially the same thing in 13:1.4. In 13:1.4 he used Campbell & Detwiller; in 13:5.2 he used Kellogg. Campbell & Detwiller frequently mentioned and credited Kellogg's *Colon Hygiene* in their book.
 3. James Thomas Case (1882-1960) enrolled at the American Medical Missionary College in Chicago in 1901, a year before the Sadlers did. He, like the Sadlers, worked at the Battle Creek Sanitarium, under John Harvey Kellogg. Case was also a Forumite, as evidenced by a letter he wrote his daughter in 1934, encouraging her to join the Forum. (The letter is here: <https://ubhistory.pastperfectonline.com/archive/8411D8CC-DB86-4526-8465-183378052827>.)
- A short biography of Case is here: <https://karger.com/onc/article-pdf/14/1/60/3303601/000224080.pdf>