

Associated Harms with Usage of Senna Leaves (Sana Makki) in Covid-19

Irshad Hussain¹

1-Institute of Pharmacy, SMBB Medical University Larkana, Pakistan

Dear Editor,

A stimulant laxative; Senna is the ornamental plants of the family Fabaceae. There has been ancient use of the drug for its laxative/purgative action. The plant is located in tropics. It contains the constituents anthraquinones, dianthrone and anthrone. Sennosides A & B are derivatives of anthraquinones at 2.5% minimal concentration. Leaves of the plants have been used for laxative/purgative action by pediatricians, pediatric surgeons and pediatric gastroenterologists.¹ Senna is described as a safe option to treat constipation. There have been some media reports of the use of Senna in Pakistan for the prophylaxis or the treatment of Covid-19 infection. Governor of the Sindh Province, Pakistan has shared his experience of the use of senna (Sana Makki) by himself when he was Covid-19 patient and has claimed before media the cure of disease symptoms with the help of Sana Makki and ginger water.² A YouTube viral video of a person introducing himself as a herbal researcher and UK resident having degree of doctorate, sharing his personal experience of the use of leaves of Senna as a potent remedy to cure the Covid-19 and presenting himself for penalty if his claims are proved false provided that the drug is used as prescribed by his method. The people have started using the leaves as suggested in the video and there are heaps of recipes of Sana Makki leaves mentioned in different links of Facebook mentioning the methods told by Dr Nazeer in video. Due to usage by community in Covid-19, the price of sanna leaves has jumped from Rs 250 per kg to around Rs 2500 per Kg. Medical professionals have described such news for of using Senna in Covid-19 as unproven, baseless and misleading and warned the public not to use the herb to avoid unintended side effects that outweigh some of its health benefits.³ Word "Senna" was combined with the word "Covid-19" using the AND boolean and searching the results at Pubmed advanced database. There was none retrieval of clinical evidence regarding the use and effectiveness of Senna in the Covid-19 infection. Only two articles were retrieved from the searched those were unrelated to the clinical use of Senna. There has been no availability of any peer reviewed or published clinical description regarding the use of senna in the Covid-19. Drug has been approved by FDA for its use in constipation/laxative action and is included among the Over the counter (OTCs) Drugs requiring no prescription.⁴ Gastrointestinal symptoms have been reported due to Covid-19 and have been included in the symptoms of the disease.⁵ Use of laxatives in GIT symptoms can definitely synergize the motility leading to diarrheal symptoms and dehydration affecting the electrolyte balance of the patients. Loss of nutrients in diarrhea and vomiting can also reduce the immunity of patients reducing the powerful natural defense of the body versus the Covid-19. It has been recommendations of American herbal products associations (AHPA) regarding the labelling instructions of the senna leave products to not use them if having diarrhea or abdominal pain and requiring the

consultation of health care provider for use in pregnant and nursing mothers as the constituents of senna irritate the bowel linings for laxative action.⁴ There have been use of Senna infusions in chronic constipation as similar use recommendations in the prophetic medicines. Medicinal plants have common anti-inflammatory properties in providing symptomatic relief in common cold, fever and sore throat. The myth of senna use in Covid-19 has started from such bases. However green tea, honey etc can be safely used in such symptoms for the much better desirable antiviral and anti-inflammatory properties than with Senna. Use of Senna in Covid-19 patients has been strongly discouraged due to its enormous side effects like diarrhea, water loss, electrolyte imbalance and hypokalemia. Such side effects can be harsh for those patients already in critical conditions. There have been many reported interactions of senna with many drugs and it is not suited for heart, liver and kidney patients. Thereby the use of Senna remains unpredictable and the risks can outweigh the benefits. Senna can also not be used for long time due to possibility of its dependency on laxatives.⁶ WHO has encouraged the clinical investigations to find safe and effective herbs in the treatment of Covid-19.⁷ Senna leaves may not be used for the prophylaxis or treatment of Covid-19 without having any sufficient clinical data as the drug is potent laxative and can raise the complications of Covid-19 patients instead of Benefits by augmenting diarrhea and other Gastrointestinal problems.

Conflict of Interest: Author declares no conflict of interest.

Declaration: The Article have been uploaded on Research gate for awareness and will be updated accordingly when published.

References:

1. Vilanova-Sanchez A, Gasior AC, Toocheck N, et al. Are Senna based laxatives safe when used as long term treatment for constipation in children?. *J Pediatr Surg*. 2018;53(4):722-727. doi:10.1016/j.jpedsurg.2018.01.002.
2. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1557883>.
3. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2234073/1-tribune-fact-check-sana-makki-cure-covid-19/>.
4. <https://www.webmd.com/vitamins/ai/ingredientmono-652/senna>.
5. Lijing Yang, and Lei Tu. Implications of gastrointestinal manifestations of COVID-19. *Lancet gastroenterology and Hepatology*. 2020, 1-2. <https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2468-1253%2820%2930132-1>.
6. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nx1K1x4N9ok> (A Report by BBC Urdu).
7. https://www.afro.who.int/news/who-supports-scientifically-proven-traditional-medicine?gclid=Cj0KCQjwiYL3BRDVARIsAF9E4GdN9SZEFe2Ez8_qlFBvF63sireJnUu1QbJsgMX27FeQdZdk7GBbgRgaAtOvEALw_wcB