

Abdominal Bloating and ‘Wind’, Gas or Flatulence

What is bloating, ‘wind’, gas or flatulence?

Wind is air trapped in the stomach and intestines (bowels) or gases produced in the intestines from food we eat.

Everyone produces gas, about 600-1000ml per day and in some people this can cause pain and embarrassment.

Changing your diet may help relieve your symptoms.

There is additional advice available for symptoms of bloating or flatulence with altered bowel habit (constipation or diarrhoea) as often found in irritable bowel syndrome.

Dietary advice to help reduce bloating

- Set aside plenty of time to eat, eat slowly and relax for a little time after your meal
 - Try eating small regular meals
 - Do not ‘gulp’ your food or drink
 - Try to avoid smoking or chewing gum
- Drink most of your fluids between meals rather than with your food
 - Allow 30-60 minutes before or after meals as liquids empty more quickly from your stomach, so if taken with food can encourage rapid emptying from your stomach and may impair digestion
 - Avoid very hot or very cold foods or drinks and avoid drinking through a straw
 - Avoid fizzy drinks
- Reduce foods which remain in your stomach for longer and may cause bloating
 - Avoid very fatty, oily meals and foods eg fried foods, cream, thickly spread margarine and butter, fatty meat and pastries
 - Reduce soluble fibres eg legumes (chick peas, kidney beans, baked beans), barley, oats, potato, broccoli, brussel sprouts, apples and pears
- Reduce your intake of high wheatbran foods eg All bran, bran flakes, baking bran
- Reduce the following foods which may be poorly absorbed and cause bloating
 - Lactose – allow a maximum of 1 small glass of milk per serving (120ml)
 - Fructose – allow a maximum of 1 serve of fruit per 2 hours and especially limit grapes and honey
 - Sorbitol – limit foods high in sorbitol eg cherries, plums, prunes, diabetic jams and marmalades, diabetic chocolate, sugar free sweets and mints
 - Sorbitol-fructose mixtures eg apples and pears (fruit and juice). Limit your intake to just a small serving or small glass but preferably choose other fruits instead

- If you suffer from constipation then avoiding this may well help reduce your symptoms of abdominal bloating. Ask for additional advice on how you can change your diet and lifestyle to help relieve and/or avoid constipation.
- If you suffer from constipation or alternating constipation/diarrhoea you may find a bulking fibre supplement helps, eg Metamucil or Mucilax.
- Try a course of probiotics and possibly prebiotics to help restore the balance of your intestinal microflora (bowel bacteria). You may need to take them for at least 3 months for effect. Ask your dietitian for more information about these supplements.
- If once you have followed this dietary advice you find little improvement, you may wish to explore the possibility of food intolerance(s) as the cause of your symptoms. Wheat, other grains or dairy are the most common food intolerances in symptoms of abdominal bloating and flatulence.

The best method to test for food intolerance is by exclusion diet. This can take approximately 2-6 weeks to complete.

If you do find you have a food intolerance, it may only be for a few months, so once you have been symptom free for a while, you should re-trial the foods you have excluded from your diet. Try them one at a time to check how well you know tolerate them.

This will help you enjoy as varied a diet as possible without unnecessary restrictions.

Dietary advice to help reduce 'wind', gas or flatulence
Follow the advice above for relief of bloating as well as the following points:

- Reduce your intake of foods which are known to produce intestinal gas:
 - Legumes, eg baked beans and lentils, apples, apple juice, grapes, grape juice, brassicas
 - Vegetables, eg broccoli, brussel sprouts, cabbage and cauliflower.
- Reduce your intake of foods high in sulphur or sulphites as these can increase gas in the intestine:
 - Dried fruits (raisins and apricots), wines, beer, cider, eggs, onions, leeks, garlic, and food containing additives numbers 220-228 (check food labels for these numbers).

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