

Got Gas? Sugars Often to Blame; *EN* Offers Remedies

Although Jay Leno may jest about methane pollution from flatulent cows, intestinal gas is no joke. Gas is actually a mixture of odorless methane, nitrogen, oxygen, carbon dioxide and hydrogen, along with many odorous compounds.

Gas ends up in the intestines two ways, from swallowing excessive air or from the incomplete digestion of food in the colon. When carbohydrate travels undigested from the small intestine to the large intestine, the beneficial bacteria that live in the bowel begin to ferment it, releasing gases and unpleasant odors.

What's Normal? The typical American passes gas about 14 times a day, on average, totaling anywhere from a half-pint to two quarts. And the foods you've eaten as well as your arsenal of available enzymes determine how peaceful a passage your last meal will have.

Soluble fiber-rich foods like oat bran, fruits, some vegetables and beans tend to produce more gas than insoluble fiber-rich foods, such as wheat bran and other vegetables. That's because bacteria in the colon break down the walls of soluble fiber, producing gas, while insoluble fiber passes through the bowel unchanged.

Finicky Four. Certain sugars are notorious for their stubborn refusal to break down and behave during digestion.

Fructose is a sugar found naturally in fruits and fruit juice, as well as in the high-fructose corn syrup used in many processed foods, especially soft drinks. A recent study from the University of Iowa notes that nearly half the population has difficulty digesting fructose, causing digestive symptoms, including excessive gas.

Lactose is the sugar found naturally in milk, though not in yogurt because resident bacteria "digest" most of it for

you. Lactose presents a challenge for people who do not produce enough of the enzyme lactase. The inability to break down lactose results in gas, pain and sometimes diarrhea. Enzyme levels decline with age, so you can develop a problem that didn't previously exist.

Raffinose is the notoriously melodious sugar responsible for beans' bad reputation. It is also present in "gassy" vegetables like cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower, along with the co-conspiratorial sugars stachyose and verbascone.

Sorbitol is a "sugar alcohol" often used to replace sucrose in sugarless candies, gums and desserts. The low-carb craze has fueled a surge in the use of this sweetener, as well as the gas and diarrhea excessive amounts can cause.

Gas That's Not a Laughing Matter. Certain medical conditions, such as Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis, can lead to gas, pain, bloating and diarrhea. An unusual onset of gas pains or change in bowel habits should be shared with your doctor so these conditions can be ruled out.

Burping and Belching. Swallowing too much air is a leading culprit of excessive gas production. Although normally expelled through belching, trapped air often makes its way through the digestive tract. Drinking carbonated beverages, chewing gum, smoking, eating or drinking quickly can all contribute to excessive air intake. Even air-filled foods, such as meringues, soufflés and milkshakes, can add to gassy troubles.

Work It Out. Although changes in what you eat can help reduce gas, a recent study shows that exercise can also provide relief. A study conducted in Spain found that mild exercise speeds the passage of gas through the intestine, leading

Over-the-Counter Relief

Activated Charcoal treats gas, odor and bloating, but reports are divided as to its effectiveness; it binds with many drugs.

Beano contains an enzyme (alpha-galactosidase) that helps break down the sugars found in beans, cruciferous vegetables and other foods.

Lactase is the enzyme that breaks down milk sugar into simple sugars that are more easily digested. Available as tablets, drops or in *Lactaid* brand dairy products.

Simethicone is the ingredient in anti-gas products like *Gas-X*, *Maalox Anti Gas* and *Phazyme*. It eases gas in the bowel by making large easy-to-pass bubbles out of small, though its effect may be limited.

to less discomfort and abdominal distension. Regular exercise also helps to establish normal bowel habits, which can decrease the symptoms of abdominal gas.

Getting Rid of Gas. What else works?

- Reduce the amount of air you swallow; avoid cigarette smoking, gum chewing, eating or drinking quickly and sucking on hard candies.
- If they give you trouble, limit how much you eat at one time of beans and cruciferous vegetables, such as broccoli, cabbage and cauliflower, which all tend to be gassy.
- Gradually increase high-fiber and gassy foods to give the bowel time to acclimate to their presence.
- Keep a food and symptom diary to help identify unique food intolerances.
- Drink fewer soft drinks and juices to avoid carbonation and fructose.
- Limit dietetic candies, gums and "low-carb" foods made with sorbitol.
- Try *Lactaid* milk products or *Lactaid* pills if you are lactose-intolerant.

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