



Factsheet: Controlling Wind and Smells

When you have a bowel problem you cannot always control the passage of gas or wind (flatus) from the back passage, and any wind that you do pass may seem to smell offensive. This can lead to feelings of embarrassment. There is no single simple solution if this is a problem for you, and different people find different things helpful. Here are a few things that you might like to try.

Remember: everyone passes wind many times a day. Most people expel about 600ml. (a pint) of gas a day, but some produce up to 2 litres (three-and-a-half pints). The average person at any time has about 200ml. (a mugful) of gas in the gut. We are all a lot more sensitive to our own smells than other people are. If you know that you have passed wind, you may detect - or think you detect - a smell that no-one else has noticed.

Food and Eating

There is no doubt that some foods tend to create more wind than others - especially foods high in fibre: when the normal bacteria in the bowel digest these, they produce gas as a by-product. However, this is very individual and food that produces a lot of wind for one person may not do so for someone else. It is worth experimenting a little, to see if eating certain foods makes things worse for you, and if avoiding those foods then helps.

The following list is not exhaustive and you may find that something not on this list is windy for you:

- Beans (including baked beans and kidney beans)
- Peas, lentils and other pulses
- Nuts (especially peanuts)
- Muesli
- Bran cereal or other foods high in bran
- Brown rice or wholemeal pasta
- Cabbage, cauliflower, carrots and broccoli
- Eggs
- Shellfish
- Milk and milk products
- Salad (especially cucumber)
- Jacket potato skins
- Leeks, swede and parsnips
- Apples, raisins, prunes
- Onions

'Slimming foods' containing fructose or sorbitol can also be troublesome; and hot spicy food, especially if you are not used to it, can increase the speed with which food travels along the bowel and increase wind production. Rich, fatty food affects some people.

Sometimes the way in which you eat means that you swallow a lot of air with your food. Try eating a little more slowly, chew each mouthful carefully (especially if the food is high in fibre), take care not to swallow air, and avoid talking too much while you are actually eating. Even if you are in a hurry, do not be tempted to wash down half-chewed food with a gulp of drink.

Eating little and often, rather than one huge meal a day, can make it easier for your intestines to cope and decrease wind production. Regular meal times can help, as an empty bowel produces more wind and gurgles.

None of this means that you should make your life difficult or miserable by having to think about everything you eat and avoiding foods you particularly like. But do try to eat a balanced diet, and to notice if anything on the list - or any other particular food - makes a difference for you. Then

you have a choice.

Drinking

Caffeine (in tea, coffee and cola) has a tendency to increase bowel activity for some people and may increase wind. Try decaffeinated tea and coffee for a week or so to see if this makes a difference.

Fizzy carbonated drinks, beer and lager also increase wind for some people. Usually you will burp this up, but a few people seem to experience more wind with these drinks. Excess alcohol intake will cause more wind than usual the next day for most people.

Eating and drinking at the same time can also increase the amount of air that you swallow, so try drinking before or after food, rather than with it.

Personal hygiene

If you are troubled by any leakage from the bowel good personal hygiene will be important in avoiding smells.

- After a bowel action, always wipe *gently* with soft toilet paper, or ideally with the newer moist toilet paper (available from larger pharmacies and some supermarkets). Discard each piece of paper after one wipe, so that you are not re-contaminating the area you have just wiped.
- Whenever possible, wash around the anus after a bowel action. A bidet is ideal (portable versions are available). If this is not possible, you may be able to use a shower attachment with your bottom over the edge of the bath. Or use a soft disposable cloth with warm water. Avoid flannels and sponges, as they can be rough and are difficult to keep clean. Sometimes a little ingenuity is needed, especially if you are away from home. Some people find that a small plant spray, watering can or jug filled with warm water makes washing easy on the toilet or over the edge of the bath.
- Do not be tempted to use disinfectants or antiseptics in the washing water as these can sting, and many people are sensitive to the chemicals in them. Plain warm water is best.
- Avoid using products with a strong perfume - such as scented soap, talcum powder and deodorants - on your bottom. Choose a non-scented soap (e.g., 'Simple' or a baby soap). Many baby wipes contain alcohol and are best avoided.
- Wear cotton underwear to allow the skin to breathe.
- Avoid using any creams or lotions on the area, unless advised to do so.

Sphincter strengthening exercises

Sometimes doing some exercises to strengthen the muscles and their speed of reaction can improve your control of wind. Ask your nurse, doctor or physiotherapist if this is likely to be helpful for you.

Controlling or disguising smells

If you are producing a lot of wind that you cannot control, some of these ideas may be of help:

- Try to ensure good ventilation of the room you are in.
- Use an aromatherapy oil burner, scented candle, joss stick or incense stick, or a dish of pot pourri (but remember to renew it regularly as the scent wears off).
- Use aerosol air freshener with care - some smell very obvious, or even worse than the smell you are trying to disguise!
- There are many solid block air fresheners that work all the time - available from chemists or supermarkets.
- Essential oils such as lavender or lemon oil can be useful.
- Anti-smelling agents – these are available on prescription in the form of sprays or drops and are usually for patients who have a stoma
- Try striking a match and then blowing it out immediately and allowing the small plume of smoke to drift into the room.

Products which some people find helpful

There is almost no scientific research on this, so the following suggestions are simply products that some people have said they found helpful in reducing wind or the smell from wind. Again, this is very individual.

- Peppermint oil
- Charcoal tablets
- ant smelling agents(available on prescription)
- Aloe Vera capsules or drink
- Cranberry juice
- Yakult (yoghurt drink from supermarkets)
- pro- biotic yoghurts
- Ido-Air

Deodorants

Your chemist may stock some deodorants specifically designed to control smells from urine or faeces.

The Bladder and Bowel Community provides information and support for people with bladder and bowel issues. We publish a wide range of user friendly booklets and factsheets.

For more information please call us on 01926 357220, email help@bladderandbowel.org or write to us at The Bladder and Bowel Community, 7 The Court, Holywell Business Park, Northfield Road, Southam, CV47 0FS.

www.bladderandbowel.org

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