



INFORMATION SHEET

MANAGING BLOATING AND WIND

INTRODUCTION

People with Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD), which includes Crohn's Disease and Ulcerative Colitis (UC), often report feeling bloated. Many also worry about excess gas and its effects, such as tummy gurgles and passing flatus (breaking wind).

This information sheet answers some of the queries most often raised about bloating and wind. It also contains suggestions and tips some people have found useful in managing these symptoms.

WHAT CAUSES BLOATING AND WIND?

There are several possible explanations for bloating and wind. A major cause of bloating is gas. Gas can be trapped in the stomach and intestines (bowels) to cause bloating, or can be expelled as wind (flatus). See more about this below.

Bloating is also a common symptom of Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS). This is a separate condition from IBD, but both UC and Crohn's are associated with a greater risk of IBS. So it is quite possible for people with IBD also to have IBS-like symptoms. For example, an attack of UC may be followed by irritable bowel symptoms, including bloating, which may last for several months.

It has been suggested that bloating is more likely to occur if you have constipation. Eating a lot of fatty food can delay stomach emptying, and this too may cause bloating and discomfort. You may also experience bloating if you have adhesions (scar tissue) as a result of previous surgery.

WHAT CAUSES GAS?

It is normal to have gas in your intestine whether or not you have IBD. We all produce several litres of gas a day through the normal processes of digestion. Some of this is reabsorbed into the bloodstream and eventually breathed out, the remainder has to be expelled as wind. Most of us probably break wind on average 15 times a day, even if we are unaware of it.

One possible cause of excess gas is swallowing too much air when eating, drinking or talking (aerophagia). Certain foods and fizzy drinks can also contribute to this. Smoking can also contribute to the amount of air that you swallow. Some people swallow air as a nervous reaction.

Excess gas can also be caused by the normal bacteria in the colon producing too much gas when they break down certain foods. Foods containing complex

carbohydrates, for example vegetables such as beans, cabbage and Brussels sprouts, are difficult for the human body to digest. They are broken down by the gas-producing bacteria instead. Foods that contain sorbitol, an artificial sweetener, can cause similar problems. Poor absorption of food by the small intestine (often common in Crohn's Disease) means that more undigested food reaches the colon, where bacteria can digest it to produce even more gas.

Research has shown that people with Crohn's in their small intestine are more likely to be lactose intolerant than people with UC or the general population. Lactose intolerance (difficulty with digesting lactose - a sugar found in milk) can cause gas. Lactose intolerance is caused by lack of the enzyme lactase in the intestine which means that the body cannot break down the lactose. Instead, it is fermented by the gas-producing bacteria in the colon.

It has also been suggested that some people may simply have more bacteria than others, or bacteria that produce more gas.

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HOW CAN I REDUCE EXCESS GAS?

Unfortunately, there is no simple solution - what works for one person may not work for another. However, some people have found the following ideas helpful:

“ I don't get as bloated if I eat small, regular meals, around six times a day, rather than larger meals less often. ”

—
Jake, age 21
Diagnosed with Crohn's Disease in 2007

“ Having my main meal at lunchtime, and avoiding eating after 6pm, helps to reduce any bloating and wind. If I do go out for dinner in the evening, I tend to just have a starter or something light. ”

—
Lucy, age 45
Diagnosed with Crohn's Disease in 2013

Think about the way you eat

- Create a relaxed environment when eating, as nervous tension at meal times can affect digestion.
- Eat small, regular meals (perhaps 5-6 a day), as an empty bowel produces more wind and rumbles.
- Some people find that eating a large meal late at night makes them feel uncomfortable. If you find this is the case for you, try to leave a longer time between eating and going to bed, to see if this helps.
- Eat slowly with your mouth closed to avoid gulping down air with your food, and make sure you chew each mouthful thoroughly.

Avoid foods that may affect you

Some foods, such as baked beans, onions, cauliflower, pulses, and whole grains are well known to be 'gassy'. Although what produces a lot of wind for one person may not for another. You could also try avoiding:

- High fat foods and eggs - these can produce bad smelling gas.
- Refined and sugary foods, especially those which contain sorbitol - an artificial sweetener.
- Hot spicy food, particularly if you are not used to it.
- Food with a high content of bran fibre (for example, brown bread and some cereals).
- Raw vegetables, particularly if you have Crohn's Disease and strictures (narrowing of the bowel). Cooking vegetables thoroughly helps to break down the fibres, which may aid digestion, and may improve bloating and wind symptoms.
- Some carbohydrate foods which are cooked and then cooled become 'resistant starch' which may cause bloating and wind, when eaten. Such foods include potato or pasta, and cooked potato products that are eaten after reheating, such as potato waffles and oven chips.

You may know that you have an intolerance or are sensitive to certain foods or ingredients. If you are having a problem identifying which foods are causing bloating and wind, it can be helpful to keep a food diary for a week or two. Note down everything you eat and drink and how it makes you feel.

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It may be worth experimenting by cutting out certain foods for a short period (4-6 weeks) to see this if this helps. However, bear in mind that cutting out a number of foods can mean missing out on valuable nutrients. It is important, if you can, to maintain a good balanced diet. Talk to your IBD team to see if they can refer you to a dietitian, particularly if you want to try a longer term or more extensive exclusion diet.

Consulting your doctor is also a good idea if you suspect you may be lactose intolerant. There are several types and levels of intolerance, and correct diagnosis is essential to identify the right solution.

Some people with Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) have found that eating a low FODMAP diet helps reduce bloating and wind. FODMAP is an abbreviation for a group of food molecules known as fermentable carbohydrates which are found in foods such as fruit, wheat and dairy products. These molecules are difficult to digest properly, so the undigested molecules pass into the colon where they act as a food source for bacteria. As the bacteria digest the FODMAPs they can cause symptoms such as bloating and wind. Cutting down food containing FODMAPs is thought to relieve these symptoms, and many people with IBS have found low FODMAP diets especially useful. Research has suggested that people with inactive IBD may also have IBS or IBS-like symptoms, and that a low FODMAP diet may be beneficial for some of these people. However, the FODMAP diet is quite restrictive and difficult to follow, so if you want to try it, you should get the help of a dietitian to ensure you do not miss out on important nutrients.

For more information on how food affects IBD and suggestions for healthy eating with UC and Crohn's, see our booklet **Food and IBD**.

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I feel less bloated after exercise, and drinking peppermint tea helps too.

”

Rachel, age 25

Diagnosed with Ulcerative Colitis in 2013

“

Going for a walk after eating helps reduce wind for me.

”

Jake, age 21

Diagnosed with Crohn's Disease in 2007

Drinking

- Drink plenty of water, ideally 2 litres per day for a woman, and 2.5 litres per day for a man, dependent on age, climate, physical activity and individual condition. It is worth checking with your IBD team how much water they suggest you should drink.
- Avoid caffeine in coffee, tea and cola. You could try decaffeinated tea, peppermint tea, green tea, or herbal and fruit teas instead.
- Avoid fizzy carbonated drinks because these contain gas.
- Alcoholic drinks can also increase the amount of gas produced.
- Avoid drinking from a straw as this can make you swallow air.

Other tips

- Try to avoid stress, which can make you gulp air. When you are tense, practise slow breathing.
- Avoid sitting for long periods. If sitting at work, take regular breaks (at least every hour) to stretch the legs and abdomen.
- Try to take regular exercise to help improve intestinal transit, for example, it may help to go for a short walk after eating in order to move digested food and gas around.
- Gently, but firmly, massage the abdomen from right to left to release trapped wind.
- Practise anal sphincter exercises to help with uncontrollable passing of wind.
- Wear clothes that are not too tight around your waist, as these can increase the pressure on your abdomen and make it harder for wind to pass along normally.

HOW CAN I GET RID OF SMELLS?

We are often a lot more sensitive to our own smells than other people are. However, if you are concerned about odours, you might find some of the ideas on the following page helpful.

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- Try to ensure that the room you are in is well ventilated.
- Light a scented candle, an aromatherapy oil burner (try lavender or lemon oil) or incense stick.
- Some people find that aerosol air fresheners can help mask smells. Try a solid block freshener that works all the time, or a freshener that releases a fragrance at regular intervals.
- Use neutralising sprays or gels that help eliminate rather than mask odours, such as Neutradol Spray or Gel (available from chemists and supermarkets), Auricare Odour Eliminator, or Fresh Drop Smell Stop (available online).
- Wear underwear or pads that absorb gas. These are available online at www.flat-d.com and www.myshreddies.com.
- Use a seat cushion that filters gas. This is available from www.gasbgon.com.

WHAT ELSE MAY RELIEVE SYMPTOMS?

Some people have found herbal remedies helpful in reducing wind. You should tell your doctor if you are taking any herbal remedies. The following suggestions have not been scientifically proven to relieve symptoms, but may be worth trying.

- Aloe Vera gels
- Charcoal tablets
- Cranberry juice
- Fresh parsley
- Herbal infusions, such as camomile, fennel or peppermint
- Peppermint oil

Some people find that simethicone helps with bloating and wind. Simethicone is an anti-foaming agent, which disperses tiny bubbles of trapped wind. It can be brought over the counter in products such as Wind-Eze tablets and WindSetlers.

Some people with Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) have found that some probiotics are helpful in reducing flatulence and wind. Probiotics are a mixture of live 'friendly' (beneficial) bacteria taken by mouth. They can be found in some specially fermented yogurt drinks or in tablet form. However, more research is needed on the overall effectiveness of probiotics, and whether they help to reduce flatulence and wind for people with IBD. If you are thinking of taking probiotics, speak to your doctor or IBD team.

FURTHER HELP

All our information sheets and booklets are available to download for free from our website: www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk. You can also get copies from our office – call or email the Information Line (see below).

Crohn’s and Colitis UK Information Line: 0300 222 5700, open Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5 pm, except Thursday open 9 am to 1 pm, and excluding English bank holidays. An answer phone and call back service operates outside these hours. You can also contact the service by email info@crohnsandcolitis.org.uk or letter (addressed to our St Albans office). Trained Information Officers provide callers with clear and balanced information on a wide range of issues relating to IBD.

Crohn’s and Colitis Support: 0121 37 9931, open Monday to Friday, 1 pm to 3.30 pm and 6.30 pm to 9 pm, excluding English bank holidays. This is a confidential, supportive listening service, which is provided by trained volunteers and is available to anyone affected by IBD. These volunteers are skilled in providing emotional support to anyone who needs a safe place to talk about living with IBD.

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ABOUT CROHN'S & COLITIS UK

We are a **national** charity established in 1979. Our aim is to improve life for anyone affected by Inflammatory Bowel Diseases. We have over 28,000 members and 50 Local groups throughout the UK. Membership costs start from £15 per year with concessionary rates for anyone experiencing financial hardship or on a low income.

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