

Gas - Excessive

Definition

- Passing bowel gas is a normal part of life.
- The average person passes gas 10 to 20 times a day (about 1 quart in adults!).
- Most people also belch or burp up stomach gas also.
- Gas is not excessive unless it happens more than twice the normal rate.

Health Information

Symptoms

- Passing gas often causes no symptoms.
- Excessive gas can cause belly bloating.
- Gas may rarely cause belly discomfort. It goes away quickly after passing gas, burping or passing a stool.

Causes of Excessive Gas

- **Swallowed Air.** Every baby is somewhat gassy. Reason: they swallow air during sucking. Babies swallow more air if they suck on a nipple that is too small or clogged. Sucking on empty bottles, pacifiers, thumbs, or blankets will also cause air swallowing. Babies swallow air when crying. Older children swallow air with gum-chewing. Children with nasal allergies swallow air if they sniff and clear their throat a lot. Some children have a nervous habit of frequent swallowing.
- **Gas-Producing Foods and Drinks.** Foods with complex carbohydrates are not fully digested. Bacteria in the bowel convert them to gas. Examples are broccoli, cabbage and beans. Carbonated drinks will also create bowel gas.
- **Lactose Intolerance.** This is the most common medical problem that causes increased gas. It is when you cannot digest milk well. The enzyme (lactase) that digests milk sugar (lactose) decreases in amount between ages 4 and 20 in many. The undigested lactose is converted into gas by the bacteria in the bowel. The amount of gas made depends upon the amount of dairy products you eat and drink. The main symptoms are bloating, diarrhea and passing a lot of gas.
- **Diarrhea.** Increased gas is made during bouts of infectious diarrhea. It gets better when the infection is over and the gut heals.
- **Constipation.** Gas can build up behind large hard stools that block the rectum. It's not extra gas but can seem like it.

Care Advice

1. Key Points

- Passing bowel gas is normal and harmless in all humans at every age.
- Swallowing air and eating gas-producing foods will increase bowel gas.
- People with lactose intolerance will have more gas when they eat dairy products.
- Excessive gas can cause bloating and some embarrassment, but it is harmless.
- Here is some care advice that should help.

2. **Let Gas Pass**

- Gas comes out of the rectum easily and at random times. It does not get stuck.
- By age 5 or 6, most children can be taught to pass gas quietly. They can also learn to delay passing gas until they are alone.
- If you want to clear any gas that has collected in your rectum, try to pass a stool. If not helpful, bend forward while sitting on the toilet or do some sit-ups.
- Do not put anything in the rectum to release gas.
- Stomach gas is more likely to pass into the intestines if a child lies down.

3. **Reduce Air Swallowing**

- If your baby is very gassy, reduce pacifier time. Make sure bottles have no air near the nipple during feeding.
- Limit your child's gum chewing.
- Stop drinking with straws.

4. **Changes in Diet that Help**

- High fiber foods increase gas. Examples are beans, peas, cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli and asparagus. These are healthy foods, so do not take them out of your child's diet entirely.
- People are different. Keep a food diary whenever you pass excessive gas. Then decide what foods you should limit or avoid.
- Drinks that contain bubbles or fizz (carbonated sodas and seltzers) increase gas.

5. **Special Case: Lactose Intolerance**

- If you feel your child has a milk intolerance, limit cow's milk to 2 glasses per day.
- Dairy products do not need to be completely stopped. You do not need to limit yogurt. Reason: it has little lactose so it's easier to digest.
- Many types of lactose-free milk are available.
- Supplements that contain lactase enzyme also can be bought. They come as drops or pills that can break down the lactose in milk.
- Lactose intolerance often runs in families.
- If the symptoms continue after you've made these simple diet changes, discuss with your child's doctor.

6. **Gas Pain Myth**

- Gas does not cause belly pain.
- Whatever is causing the gas, like a diarrhea virus, can cause mild cramps.
- So can constipation, but gas is not the cause.

Call Your Doctor If

- Loose stools last over 7 days
- Severe abdominal pain
- You think your child needs to be seen
- You have other questions or concerns

Pediatric Care Advice

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