

BERKSHIRE GASTROENTEROLOGY

T.DUNZENDORFER, M.D.

10 ways to silence a classic case of gas

Annoying, embarrassing, but not fatal, gas is a common complaint. What can be done to silence the sound that trumpets an aging G.I.tract? Here are 10 insights that may make a difference.

1. Breathing through the mouth causes air to get trapped in the stomach, and it has to go somewhere, somehow. Make a conscious effort to breathe through your nose. If your nose is stuffy from allergies, talk to your primary or ENT doctor about treatment.
2. Chew each bite of food 10 times. Saliva contains enzymes that start the digestive process. It's easier to break down and absorb a well-masticated morsel than a barely chewed chunk. (Look around -- most people eat much too quickly.)
3. Some foods that you love don't love you back. Cabbage, broccoli, beans, onions and peppers are a few of the vegetables that process in a way that results in gas.
4. Lactose intolerance is the inability to digest dairy products. Over-the-counter products such as Lactaid contain lactase, the enzyme missing in lactose intolerant people. Or switch to soy milk, which is not a dairy product, but has the same amount of protein as milk.
5. Constipation can result in 'lower' gas or flatulence. The body is trying to expel the stool, and is only succeeding in pushing intestinal gas out at inappropriate times. A high fiber diet, extra fluids and yogurts that contain probiotics (good bacteria) may help.
6. Acid reflux can cause excess belching, and treatment with over-the-counter or prescription anti-reflux medications can make a big difference.
7. Calcium carbonate (Oscal and others) can cause gas, bloating and constipation. Switching to calcium citrate (Citracal and others) may be the answer.
8. Psyllium (Metamucil, Konsyl) is an excellent natural fiber that helps constipation and binds bile acids, which can result in gas. Sometimes however, the product makes bloating symptoms worse, so another choice is a manmade fiber such as those found in Citrucel or Fibersure.
9. Complex carbohydrate intolerance is becoming a more common diagnosis. Many people are aware that fruits, vegetables and whole grains are important, but have severe gas and constipation when they try to include them in their diet. The enzyme alpha galactoside (Beano) occasionally can help reduce symptoms by aiding digestion.
10. Carbonated beverages such as soda pop, beer and carbonated waters cause excess gas in the gut. Switching to lemonade, iced tea or flavored water is a good option. Also, avoid smoking and chewing gum.