

Wind and bloating

Intestinal gas

Everyone passes wind regularly although some complain of the issue more than others. There is a wide variation to the normal range but average is in the order of seven times a day for women and 12 times a day for men.

The colon contains a large colony of bacteria which assist digestion of gut contents by fermentation which leads to the release of gas in the colon. Individuals tend to be either methane producers or sulphate producers depending on their individual bacterial colonies. This can explain why some people have more odour to their flatus than others as most of the smell comes from sulphur-containing gases. Most of the gas produced in the large bowel is reabsorbed through the blood stream and breathed out via the lungs but some remains and is released by the anus. An average person releases 1.5 - 2L of gas from the anus each day.

Management of the volume or odour of wind typically focuses on reducing the fibre and sulphur in the diet. Culprit foods can include cabbage, onions, peas, beans, garlic and eggs. Sulphites are commonly used in preservatives and therefore may be in processed foods like preserved meats and dried fruits. There are other preparations available to assist but the response to these can be quite unpredictable eg simethicone (Degas, infacol), peppermint (mintec), fennel

Bloating

This is a common symptom that is usually not related to serious disease. It can arise from delayed movement or re-absorption of intestinal gas. It is often worse later in the day and after meals. We commonly undertake testing to ensure the bowel is structurally normal before considering symptomatic treatments. Bloating may be due to an abnormality in the propulsion of gas in the intestine or an increased sensitivity to distension in the intestine.

Common management strategies can include

- Considering dietary triggers and avoiding these. Often a low FODMAP diet is suggested but enlisting the help of a dietician is very useful. Caffeine, fatty foods, alcohol and artificial sweeteners can also be triggers in some patients.
- Addressing issues with constipation - but remember that insoluble fibre can worsen gas production. Movicol, osmolax and coloxyl typically don't. Don't hold on to gas.
- Regular movement and exercise – this can help with gut activity
- Iberogast is a herbal preparation which may be helpful in promoting gut activity. Occasionally prescribed medications are also used.
- Probiotics may alter the gut bacteria and assist with symptoms
- Addressing issues of stress and lifestyle which can alter gut activity and pain responses