GAS, BLOATING AND BELCHING: POSSIBLE CAUSES AND WHEN TO GO TO THE DOCTOR

Samer Shaja, DO
Ronald Januchowski, DO, FACOFP, Editor • Paula Gregory, DO, MBA, CHCQM, FAIHQ, Health Literacy Editor

Gas (flatulence or belching) is very common and is not harmful. Flatulence is gas that is released by the rectum. Belching (or burping) is gas that is released from the mouth. The buildup of gas or food contents within the digestive tract can lead to an upper body fullness feeling often described as bloating. Gas is commonly caused by swallowing air; you swallow air into your stomach when you eat food or drink fluids. Gas can also form as a byproduct of bacteria in your intestines when digesting food. Some foods that can increase gas being formed include high fiber foods such as: beans, broccoli, lentils, asparagus, peas, onions, cabbage and whole grain foods. Other foods, such as dairy products or carbonated drinks, can also cause a lot of gas to form. Poorly fitting dentures can cause gas as a lot of saliva (with air bubbles in it) is swallowed. Chewing gum or sucking hard candy can also produce swallowed gas.

POSSIBLE CAUSES:

• Carbonated beverages such as soda or beer
• Bears
• Chewing gum or sucking hard cand
• Drinking dairy
• Improperly fitted dentures
• Eating food too fast

MEDICAL CARE AND TREATMENT OPTIONS:
Gas, bloating and belching are not usually due to medical problems but rather; they are symptoms that are often due to the way your body normally works.

WHEN TO SEEK EMERGENCY ATTENTION?

• If you experience chest pain, sweating, shortness of breath, painful breathing or dizziness/light headedness while having gas pain you should seek emergency medical attention.
• If you have nausea, vomiting, persistent or worsening abdominal pain, bright red stools, dark black or sticky/tarry stools or vomiting of a coffee ground-like material. The dark black material in the vomitus or stool may be blood.
• If it has been longer than usual since your last bowel movement and you are no longer passing gas through your rectum. This is when the normal flow of material through the digestive tract is blocked.

POSSIBLE CAUSES AND WHEN TO GO TO THE DOCTOR

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PROBIOTICS: WHAT ARE THEY? WHAT DO THEY DO?

Sandi Aung, DO
Ronald Januchowski, DO, FACOFP, Editor • Paula Gregory, DO, MBA, CHCQM, FAIHQ, Health Literacy Editor

Probiotics are the good “gut bacteria” that are made to be similar to the bacteria already in your digestive tract. Having too much of the “bad” bacteria in your body can cause an imbalance, leading to all types of health problems such as fatigue, constipation, diarrhea, weight gain, and all varieties of chronic health problems.

DIFFERENT PROBIOTIC FORMS

Probiotics come in several forms, including the more familiar form of nutritional supplement pills, but they also exist in probiotic food products such as certain type of yogurts, kefir, cheeses, lactobacillus milk products, cheeses, or fermented foods like sauerkraut, and kimchi.

A probiotic dietary supplement can aid your body in maintaining health in a variety of ways. However, not all probiotics are the same, and your body may respond to different forms of probiotics and different strains of bacteria in different ways. For example, if you’re lactose-intolerant, avoid taking probiotics in the form of dairy products. Common strains include Lactobacillus species, Bifidobacteria, Saccharomyces boulardii and Bacillus coagulans.

SAFEY OF PROBIOTICS

Probiotics are safe in the amounts you normally find in food. In general, most healthy adults can safely add foods or dietary supplements that contain probiotics to their diets. Some individuals might experience gas (flatulence), but that generally passes after a few days. Remember, probiotics are not all the same, and your body may react differently to different strains and how you ingest it.

WHAT DO PROBIOTICS DO?

Probiotics are believed to balance our digestive tract to keep a healthy balance between the good and bad bacteria. In our daily lives, many factors including stress, poor sleep, nutritional imbalance, antibiotic overuse, other medications, emotional and environmental stress can all cause a shift towards the bad bacteria predominating our digestive tract.

When our digestive tract is healthy, it does its job more effectively by filtering toxins, and eliminating harmful bacteria, chemicals, and other waste products more efficiently and promote healthy immune system and reduce some common health issues such as bloating, diarrhea, antibiotic-associated diarrhea, Helicobacter pylori infection and promote healthy gut transit.

Research on probiotics also has shown it may protect us from allergic reactions and autoimmune diseases such as Rheumatoid arthritis, Ulcerative colitis, Irritable bowel syndrome, and lessen opportunistic infections in general.

Talk to your family doctor if beginning a probiotic supplement is right for you. Your osteopathic physician can help in deciding the right form of probiotics, and guide you towards healthy digestive tract options.

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SOURCE(S): American College of Gastroenterology; National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases; International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders

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For additional patient related educational material please visit our website at www.acofp.org.

SOURCE(S): The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Mediscript.com; MayoClinic.org

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