

Patient Information Leaflet

The North West London Hospitals 
NHS Trust

Central Middlesex Hospital

Tips on Controlling Wind and Smells

The Burdett Institute
of Gastrointestinal Nursing 

Tips on Controlling Wind and Smells

Having a bowel problem can sometimes mean that you cannot reliably control passage of gas or wind (flatus) from the back passage, or that any wind that you do pass seems to smell offensive. This can lead to feelings of embarrassment. There is no one simple solution to this if it is a problem for you, and different people find different things helpful. Here are a few things that you might like to try.

Remember that we are all a lot more sensitive to our own smells than other people are. If you know that you have passed wind, you may be looking for a smell that no-one else has noticed.

Food and Eating

There is no doubt that some foods have a tendency to lead to more wind production than others. Often this is foods high in fibre, which the normal bacteria in the bowel digest, producing gas as a by-product. However, this is very individual, and food that produces a lot of wind for one person may not do so for someone else. It is worth experimenting a little, to see if eating certain foods makes things worse for you, and if avoiding those foods then helps. The following list is not exhaustive and you may find that something not on this list is windy for you:

Beans (including baked beans and kidney beans)	Eggs
Peas, lentils and other pulses	Shellfish
Nuts (especially peanuts)	Milk & milk products
Salad (especially cucumber)	Muesli
Bran cereal or other foods high in bran	Jacket potato skins
Brown rice or wholemeal pasta	Leeks, swede & parsnips
Cabbage, cauliflower, carrots and broccoli	Onions
Radishes	Dried fruits

Hot spicy food, especially if you are not used to it, can increase the speed with which food travels along the bowel and increase wind production. Rich, fatty food affects some people.

Sometimes the way in which you eat means that you swallow a lot of air with your food. Try eating a little more slowly, chew each mouthful carefully (especially if the food is high in fibre), take care not to swallow air, and avoid talking too much while you are actually eating. If you are in a hurry, do not be tempted to wash down half-chewed food with a gulp of drink.

Eating little and often, rather than one huge meal a day can make it easier for your intestines to cope and decreases wind production. Regular meal times can help, as an empty bowel produces more wind and gurgles. However, it is important not to get into the habit of taking too many snacks between meals.

All of this does not mean that you should make your life difficult or miserable by having to think about everything that you eat and not eating foods that you particularly like. But do try to eat a balanced diet, and to notice if any of the above makes a difference for you. Then you have a choice.

Drinking

Caffeine (in tea, coffee and cola) has a tendency to increase bowel activity for some people and may increase wind. Try decaffeinated tea and coffee for a week or so to see if this makes a difference.

Fizzy carbonated drinks and beer (or lager) can also increase wind for some people. Usually you will burp this up, but a few people seem to experience more wind with these drinks. Excess alcohol intake will cause more wind than usual the next day for most people.

Eating and drinking at the same time can also increase the amount of air that you swallow, so try drinking before or after food, rather than with it.

Some people find that herbal tea calms their bowel and that less wind seems to be produced. Camomile, peppermint and fennel teas are each found useful by some people.

Personal hygiene

If you are troubled by any leakage from the bowel, good personal hygiene will be important in avoiding smells.

- After a bowel action, always wipe GENTLY with soft toilet paper, or ideally moist toilet paper (available from larger pharmacies and some supermarkets). Discard each piece of paper after one wipe, so that you are not re-contaminating the area you have just wiped.
- Whenever possible, wash around the anus after a bowel action. A bidet is ideal (portable versions are available). If this is not possible, you may be able to use a shower attachment with your bottom over the edge of the bath. Or use a soft disposable cloth with warm water. Avoid flannels and sponges, as they can be rough and are difficult to keep clean. Sometimes a little ingenuity is needed, especially if you are away from home. Some people find that a small plant spray, watering can or jug filled with warm water makes washing easy on the toilet or over the edge of the bath.
- Do not be tempted to use disinfectants or antiseptics in the washing water as these can sting, and many people are sensitive to the chemicals in them. Just plain warm water is best.

- AVOID using products with a strong perfume such as scented soap, talcum powder or deodorants on your bottom. Choose a non-scented soap (e.g. 'Simple', or a baby soap). Many baby wipes contain alcohol and are best avoided.
- Wear cotton underwear to allow the skin to breathe.
- Avoid using any creams or lotions on the area, unless advised to do so.

Sphincter strengthening exercises

Sometimes doing some exercises to strengthen the muscles and their speed of reaction can improve your control of wind. Please ask your nurse, doctor or physiotherapist if this is likely to be helpful for you.

Controlling or disguising smells

If you are producing a lot of wind that you cannot control, some of these ideas may be of help.

- Try to ensure good ventilation of the room you are in.
- Use an aromatherapy oil burner, scented candle, joss stick or incense stick, or a dish of pot pourri (remember to renew regularly as the scent wears off).
- Use aerosol air freshener with care - some smell very obvious, or even worse than the smell you are trying to disguise!
- There are many solid block air fresheners that work all the time - available from chemists or supermarkets.
- Essential oils such as lavender or lemon oil can be useful.
- Try striking a match and then blowing it out immediately and allowing the small plume of smoke to drift into the room. You may like to keep a box of matches and an egg cup for the used match in your toilet.

Products which some people find helpful

There is almost no scientific research on this, so we cannot actually recommend any products. But some people do tell us that something has been helpful. Again, this is very individual. Some people find that one or more of the following products reduces wind, or reduces the smell from wind:

- Peppermint oil
- Pepto-bismol, Rennies and other over-the counter indigestion medicines
- Charcoal tablets
- Mint tea

- Cardomom seeds (chewed)
- Aloe Vera capsules or juice
- Probiotic drink (from the yoghurt counter at the supermarket e.g. Yakult, Actimel)
- Acidophilus (from health food shop).

If you can find a good health food shop, advice is often available on a wide range of other products which may be worth trying.

Deodorants

Your chemist may stock some deodorants specifically designed to control smells from urine or faeces. Neutradol spray or gel (MS George Ltd), Atmocol (Seton Healthcare), Chironair (Sims Portex), Daydrop (Loxley Medical) are among the most commonly available.

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