

# Gastrointestinal Gas



## What causes intestinal gas?

Everyone has gas in their stomach and intestine. Air gets there mainly by being swallowed. Although carbonated drinks like soda release a small amount of carbon

dioxide gas, it is often expelled as a belch or a burp. Little gas is found in the small intestine, and most of it is swallowed air on its way to the large intestine (the colon). Additional gas in the colon is created when bacteria digest certain components of food that are not completely absorbed. The most common sources of gas in the colon are:

- Fiber-rich foods such as whole grains
- Sugars found in mushrooms, and some fruits and vegetables
- Lactose, in people with lactose intolerance
- Sweeteners like sorbitol or xylitol used in food, candy and chewing gum

The most common gases produced in the intestine are hydrogen, carbon dioxide, and methane, none of which are foul smelling. The offensive smell of gas is caused as tiny amounts of proteins, fat and carbohydrates breakdown by certain bacteria.

## What are the symptoms of intestinal gas?

Everyone passes gas each day. This is normal and does not have to be painful or considered a problem. Excess gas that can be caused by eating large amounts of indigestible foods can cause bloating, cramps, pain, and diarrhea. Excessive belching or burping can result from frequent air swallowing and is seen in children who suck on pacifiers or cry for long periods of time. In older children, chewing gum can be factor. Purposeful air gulping is a common “talent” learned and displayed by some school-age children and teenagers.

## How is gastrointestinal gas controlled?

The best way to control intestinal gas is to avoid the consumption of those foods that generate the gas. A “low gas diet” eliminates large amounts of fiber-rich vegetables and fruits, particularly items such

as beans, asparagus, mushrooms, cauliflower or broccoli. Cooking these foods and pre-soaking them will diminish their ability to form gas.

Trial and error is often needed to pinpoint the main culprit of increased gas in an individual. Lactose restriction or use of a lactase enzyme supplement will help those with lactose intolerance.

Use of medications such as simethicone or activated charcoal is popular but probably not beneficial.

For more information or to locate a pediatric gastroenterologist in your area please visit our website at: [www.naspghan.org](http://www.naspghan.org)

**IMPORTANT REMINDER:** This information from the North American Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition (NASPGHAN) is intended only to provide general information and not as a definitive basis for diagnosis or treatment in any particular case. It is very important that you consult your doctor about your specific condition.

## SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS:



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