SYMPTOM

Flatus

Flatus is gas passed from the digestive tract through the anus.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE
Passing more wind than usual, sometimes with pressure or bloating

WHERE IT IS FELT
Lower digestive tract and anus

MOST COMMON CAUSES
Swallowed air, fermentable foods, constipation

WHEN IT IS URGENT
Severe belly pain, repeated vomiting, or marked abdominal swelling

USUALLY LASTS
Hours to days, depending on food and bowel function

SEE A DOCTOR IF
Persistent change, weight loss, bowel changes, or blood in stool

Overview

Flatus, commonly called gas or wind, is gas released from the digestive tract through the anus. Passing some gas is a normal part of digestion.

Gas enters the digestive system when you swallow air. It is also produced when bacteria in the large bowel break down carbohydrates that were not fully digested.

You may notice more flatus after certain foods, fizzy drinks, eating quickly, or constipation. The amount, smell, and timing vary, so a change from your usual pattern matters more than a particular number of times per day.

Flatus alone is rarely serious. Severe pain, vomiting, bleeding, or weight loss may need medical assessment.

What it may feel or look like

You may pass wind more often or find it harder to control. It can be quiet or noisy and may have little or a strong smell.

Other symptoms can include:

The smell often comes from sulfur-containing gases made by bowel bacteria. A strong smell alone does not mean something is wrong.

Bloating and flatus are related but different. Bloating is fullness or swelling; flatus is gas leaving the body.

- Pressure, movement, or rumbling in the belly
- Bloating or fullness
- Mild cramps that improve after passing gas
- Belching, especially when swallowed air is involved

Common causes

Common causes include swallowed air and normal food digestion. You may swallow more air when eating quickly, chewing gum, smoking, drinking through a straw, or having fizzy drinks.

Some carbohydrates are not fully absorbed in the small bowel. Bacteria ferment them in the large bowel, producing gas. Triggers can include beans, lentils, onions, some fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and sweeteners ending in "-ol." Foods affect people differently.

Constipation keeps stool and gas in the bowel longer, which may increase pressure, bloating, and odor.

Less common causes include lactose intolerance, coeliac disease, and irritable bowel syndrome. These may cause gas with pain, diarrhea, constipation, or other bowel changes.

Medicines and supplements can also increase gas or alter bowel movements. Do not stop prescribed medicine without speaking to a healthcare professional.

Urgent causes are uncommon. A blocked bowel can cause marked swelling, severe pain, vomiting, and an inability to pass stool or gas. Flatus without these symptoms does not usually suggest a blockage.

When to seek medical care

Seek emergency help for severe or rapidly worsening abdominal pain, repeated vomiting, a hard or markedly swollen abdomen, fainting, chest pain, or trouble breathing. An inability to pass stool or gas with severe pain and swelling also needs urgent assessment.

Get same-day medical advice if flatus occurs with persistent vomiting, fever, black or bloody stool, or significant abdominal pain. Heavy rectal bleeding or feeling faint with bleeding is an

emergency.

Book a routine appointment if the change lasts several weeks, keeps returning, wakes you from sleep, or affects daily life. Also seek assessment for unexplained weight loss, ongoing diarrhea or constipation, reduced appetite, or a lasting change in bowel habits.

How the cause is found

A healthcare professional may ask when the gas began, whether it follows particular foods, and whether you have pain, bloating, diarrhea, or constipation. They may also ask about medicines, supplements, recent illness, surgery, and family history.

A short record of meals, symptoms, and bowel movements may reveal a pattern. Avoid removing many foods before your appointment, as this can make the cause harder to identify and may limit nutrition.

The clinician may examine your abdomen. Tests are not always needed but can include blood, stool, or breath tests. Scans or a camera examination of the digestive tract are generally used only for specific concerns.

Treatment and self-care

Treatment depends on the cause. For gas related to swallowed air, food, or constipation, try:

A food diary can help identify repeat triggers. If dairy seems related, do not assume lactose intolerance without considering other foods and symptoms. A clinician or dietitian can help test triggers while maintaining balanced nutrition.

A low-FODMAP diet reduces certain poorly absorbed carbohydrates. Because it is restrictive and requires foods to be reintroduced, follow it with guidance from a dietitian or other qualified professional.

Non-prescription gas remedies help some people, depending on the cause. Ask a pharmacist whether a product is suitable, particularly if you are pregnant, take other medicines, or have an ongoing health condition.

- Eating slowly and chewing with your mouth closed
- Reducing fizzy drinks, gum, and drinking through straws
- Eating smaller meals if large meals trigger symptoms
- Changing one suspected food at a time

- Drinking enough fluid and staying active
- Addressing constipation with professional advice when needed

What to expect

Gas caused by a meal or swallowed air often settles within hours. Gas related to constipation may improve once bowel movements become regular.

If a carbohydrate is responsible, symptoms may return after eating enough of that food. Complete avoidance may not be necessary; a smaller portion may be comfortable.

Conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome can come and go. Arrange follow-up if your pattern changes or initial measures do not help.

Common questions

Is passing gas normal?

Yes. It removes swallowed air and gases made during digestion. A persistent change or accompanying symptoms are more important than frequency alone.

Why does flatus smell?

Most bowel gases have little smell, but sulfur-containing gases can create a strong odor. Food, constipation, and bowel bacteria can affect it.

Is it harmful to hold gas in?

Holding it briefly is not usually harmful, but it may increase discomfort or bloating. The gas will usually pass later or move through the bowel.

Can stress cause more gas?

Stress can affect eating, swallowing, and bowel activity and make digestive sensations more noticeable. New or persistent symptoms should not automatically be attributed to stress.

Should I avoid all foods that cause gas?

Usually not. Many contain useful fibre and nutrients. Identify repeat triggers and adjust portions rather than removing broad food groups without guidance.

Sources



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