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## FLATUS

This general guide is designed to provide background information. It aims to supplement verbal discussion, to answer common questions and to be readily available as an *aide memoir*. Further information is available at the web site above. This site also provides links to other sites that may provide additional information.

### What is flatus?

Flatus is the passage of gas through the anus. It is natural phenomena occurring 10 to 20 times a day. Nitrogen is the primary gas released. Other gases are carbon dioxide, oxygen, hydrogen, and sometimes methane. The gas released frequently has an unpleasant odour which comes from bacteria in the large intestine that release sulfur.

### Causes.

Air swallowing (aerophagia) is a common cause of gas in the stomach. Eating or drinking rapidly, chewing gum or smoking can cause some people to take in more air. Burping, or belching, is the way most swallowed air leaves the stomach. The remaining gas moves into the small intestine where it is partially absorbed. A small amount travels into the large intestine for release through the anus. Certain foods are known to cause increase gas production.

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| <b>Carbohydrates</b> | The sugars that cause gas are raffinose, lactose, fructose, and sorbitol. They are found in beans, milk, onions, artichokes, wheat and naturally in fruits, including apples, pears, peaches, and prunes. They may also be used as an artificial sweetener in soft drinks, fruit drinks and in many dietetic foods.                            |
| <b>Starches</b>      | Most starches, including potatoes, corn, noodles, and wheat, produce gas as they are broken down in the large intestine. Rice is the only starch that does not cause gas.  |
| <b>Fibre</b>         | Soluble fibre, which dissolves easily in water, is found in oat bran, beans, peas, and most fruits. It is not broken down until it reaches the large intestine, where digestion causes gas.<br><br>Insoluble fibre passes through the intestines unchanged and produces little gas. Wheat bran and some vegetables contain this kind of fibre. |

### How to manage excessive gas

The best way to reduce flatus is adjust the diet. Careful review of diet and the amount of gas passed may help relate specific foods to symptoms and determine the severity of the problem. For example, if lactase deficiency is the suspected milk products should be avoided for a period of time to assess the impact of exclusion. A blood or breath test may be used to diagnose lactose intolerance.

Reducing foods that cause gas may also be worth trying. In the short term this may mean cutting out healthy foods, such as fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and milk products. Effective dietary changes depend on learning through trial and error.

## **Medications**

Many nonprescription, over-the-counter medicines are available to help reduce flatus.

- Antacids** Antacids, such as Mylanta II, Maalox II, and Di-Gel, contain simethicone, a foaming agent that joins gas bubbles in the stomach so that gas is more easily belched away. However, these medicines have no effect on intestinal gas. Dosage varies depending on the form of medication and the patient's age.
- Lactase** The enzyme lactase, which aids with lactose digestion, is available in caplet and chewable tablet form without a prescription (Lactaid and Lactrase). Chewing lactase tablets just before eating helps digest foods that contain lactose. Also, lactose-reduced milk and other products are available at many grocery stores (Lactaid and Dairy Ease).
- Digestive enzymes** These can significantly reduce the amount of flatulence that is caused by some components of foods not being digested.