



## **Managing Bloating & Flatulence in IBD** **Patient Information Sheet**

### **Introduction**

People with Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD), which includes Crohn's Disease and Ulcerative Colitis (UC), often report feeling bloated. Many also worry about excess wind and its effects, such as tummy gurgles and flatulence (breaking wind). This information sheet answers some of the queries most often raised about bloating and flatulence. It also contains suggestions and tips other people have found useful in managing these symptoms.

### **What causes bloating?**

If your stomach or abdomen feels bloated, it may well be due to excess wind. However, there are also other possible causes, such as water retention, which may be linked to a hormone imbalance.

Bloating is also a common functional symptom, which is often misdiagnosed as Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS). Interestingly bloating is not actually recognised as part of the official (Rome III) diagnostic criteria for IBS. Functional symptoms can occur separately from inflammation and can be seen in IBD patients with a frequency of 60% in UC and 40% in Crohn's. So it is common for IBD patients to also have functional or IBS-like symptoms. This is probably because of short-term damage to nerve endings in the intestine, caused by inflammation. It is not uncommon after an acute flare of IBD for the immediate period of remission to be plagued by functional bowel symptoms, including bloating, that may last for several months.

It has been indicated that people with IBS often have increased gut sensitivity, and may feel bloated even when they do not have an excess of flatulence. IBS attacks may be triggered by stress, and it is thought that this increased sensitivity could be the result of the stress affecting the normal communications between the brain and the gut. Eating a lot of fatty food can delay stomach emptying, and this too may cause bloating and discomfort. You may also experience bloating if you have scar tissue as a result of operations.

It has also been suggested that bloating is the result of a sluggish bowel, and that this is more likely to occur if you have constipation, which can also be a feature of Crohn's or UC when in remission. It can be difficult for patients and doctors alike to differentiate between what is IBD and what is IBS. Blood tests with inflammatory markers (ESR and CRP) and faecal calprotectin can be particularly useful here.

## **What causes Flatulence?**

It is normal to have gas in your intestines and there is no evidence that people with IBD have any more gas than the general population. We each produce about 5 litres of gas a day through the normal processes of digestion. Some of this is reabsorbed into the bloodstream and is eventually breathed out: the remainder has to be expelled as wind. Most people (that includes women) break wind some 20 -30 times a day, even if we are not aware of it. Excess or troublesome wind is generally thought to be caused by:-

- a) Aerophagia - Swallowing too much air while eating or talking. Some people swallow air as a nervous reaction. Certain foods (salads and noodles) and fizzy drinks can also contribute to this.
- b) Small Bowel Bacterial Overgrowth - Increased or over-production of gas by the bacteria in the intestines. Most of the gas produced is used by other bacteria in beneficial ways, but the system can get out of balance.
- c) Poor digestion and absorption of foods in the small intestine (often a feature of Crohn's disease) so that more undigested food reaches the large intestine, which can also lead to increased gas production. This is most likely to happen with foods high in carbohydrates, especially sugars and starches, such as fruit, vegetables, beans, pulses, and whole grains.
- d) FODMAP foods - Fermentable Oligosaccharides, Disaccharides, Monosaccharides And Polymerols - Certain carbohydrates (eg. common artificial sweeteners) are poorly tolerated by our bowels.
- e) Lactose intolerance - A deficiency in the enzyme lactase can make it difficult to digest some of the sugars in cows milk. This condition is incredibly common and increases in frequency with age.
- f) It has also been suggested that some people may simply have more bacteria than others, or bacteria that are more efficient at producing gas.

## **How can I reduce excess Flatulence?**

Unfortunately, there is no one simple solution: what works for one person may not work for another. However, people have generally found at least some of the following ideas helpful.

### **Think about the way you eat**

- Create a relaxed environment when eating, as nervous tension at meal times limits digestion.
- Eat slowly with your mouth closed to avoid gulping down air with your food.
- Avoid talking during mealtimes to reduce air swallowing.
- Chew each mouthful thoroughly, especially if the food is high in fibre.
- Try to take a 30-minute break after eating, to digest your food.
- Eat small, regular meals (perhaps 5-6 a day), as an empty bowel produces more wind and gurgles.
- Avoid a pattern of not eating much during the day and a large meal late at night, leaving food 'sitting' in the system.

### **Avoid foods that may affect you**

There is no doubt that some foods have a tendency to lead to more flatulence production than others. Often these foods are higher 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 (Also look at the Low FODMAP diet information sheet). 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. You may know that you have an intolerance of or are sensitive to certain foods or perhaps ingredients. If you are having a problem identifying which foods are causing bloating and wind, it can be helpful to keep a food diary for a week or two. 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. As a general rule ensure that all vegetables are well cooked. Insoluble fibre can be a particular problem so remove the skins and seeds from all fruits and vegetables before eating. If you do feel you need to increase the level of fibre in your diet, for example during a period of IBD remission, do so very slowly.

Some research studies have suggested that the food sensitivities that we see occurring during IBD flares ups may only be temporary. As the gut lining heals, the food can be re-introduced without any problems. This can happen with lactose intolerance too, and you may find that in remission, milk and milk products can be reintroduced. If your food intolerance does seem to be long term, and you decide it would help to give up a particular food, look for a suitable substitute. For example, if you want to avoid wheat, try eating rye bread, rice, millet, oatcakes or porridge. If you are avoiding dairy products, try soya, rice or oat milk, and take a calcium supplement.

### **Drinking**

Caffeine (in tea, coffee and cola) has a tendency to increase bowel activity for some people and may increase flatulence. 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 flatulence for some people. Usually you will burp this up, but a few people seem to experience more wind with these drinks. If so, then pour and allow to stand for 10 minutes. 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. Slowly sip water at room temperature. Avoid drinking from a straw to limit air swallowing.

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.

### **Other tips**

- Avoid chewing gum, as this makes you swallow air.
- Try to avoid stress, which can make you gulp air. When you are tense, practise slow breathing.
- Avoid sitting for long periods. If sitting at work, take regular breaks (at least every hour) to stretch the legs and abdomen.
- Try to take regular exercise. Even a 20-30 minute brisk walk four times a week can improve bowel function.

### **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. NB - Please be careful with this last technique (apparently flash-back can occur!)
- Use neutralising sprays or gels that help to eliminate rather than mask odours

### **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 consider using 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.

### **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. 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
- Cardamom seeds (chewed)
- Aloe Vera capsules or juice
- Probiotic yoghurt drinks e.g. Yakult, Actimel

Research is continuing into the role of the bacteria in the colon, particularly those which may be 'friendly' or beneficial. There is some evidence for probiotics (mixtures of friendly bacteria taken by mouth) having a positive effect on IBS symptoms, although it may depend on the strain of the bacteria involved. Some people have found taking probiotic supplements helpful in reducing flatulence. Probiotic yoghurts in particular have been found to be useful in reducing symptoms of lactase intolerance including flatulence. (NB - In my research we always warn patients that as most probiotics are gas forming bacteria, this could make their bloating and flatulence worse).