

Bladder and Bowel Service

Tips on controlling bowel 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 and milk products
Muesli	Salad (especially cucumber)
Bran cereal or other foods high in bran	Jacket potato skins
Brown rice or wholemeal pasta	Leeks, swede and parsnips
Cabbage, cauliflower, carrots and broccoli	Onions

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 gut to cope and decrease wind production. Regular meal times can help, as an empty bowel produces more wind and gurgles.

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) also increase wind for some people, and excess alcohol intake will cause more wind than usual.

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.

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 the newer 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 warm water is best.
- ◆ **Avoid** using products with a strong perfume such as a scented soap, talcum powder, or deodorants on your bottom. Choose a non-scented soap (e.g. 'Simple', or a baby soap).
- ◆ Wear cotton underwear to allow the skin to breathe and 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, as 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, incense stick, or a dish of pot pourri
- ◆ Use aerosol air fresheners with care
- ◆ 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