

Gas and Radiation Treatment

When you receive radiation treatment for cancer, marks are placed on the skin to help direct radiation treatment to the exact location of the cancer. If you have gas and are bloated in your abdominal and pelvic area, these marks can move out of the correct treatment position. Changes in your diet may help reduce gas.

People's eating habits and diet affect the amount of gas they have. For example, eating and drinking too fast may increase the amount of air swallowed, and foods that contain carbohydrates may cause some people to have more gas.

Which foods cause gas?

Most foods that contain carbohydrates can cause gas. In contrast, fats and proteins cause little gas. Foods that produce gas in one person may not cause gas in someone else. This depends on how well an individual digests carbohydrate and the type of bacteria present in the intestines.

Below are types of foods that may cause gas:

- Beans
- Vegetables such as broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, onions, mushrooms, artichokes and asparagus
- Fruits such as pears, apples and peaches
- Whole grains such as whole wheat and bran
- Sodas
- Fruit drinks, especially apple juice and pear juice; and other drinks that contain high-fructose corn syrup which is a sweetener made from corn
- Milk and milk products such as cheese, ice cream and yogurt
- Packaged foods, such as bread, cereal and salad dressing that contain small amounts of lactose, a sugar found in milk and foods made with milk
- Sugar-free candies and gums that contain sugar alcohols such as sorbitol, mannitol and xylitol

What are some ways to reduce gas?

People who think they have too much gas can try to treat gas on their own before seeing a health care provider. Try the tips below to treat gas on your own

Reducing Swallowed Air

Swallowing less air may help reduce gas, especially for people who burp frequently. A health care provider may suggest eating more slowly, avoiding gum and hard candies or checking with a dentist to make sure dentures fit correctly.

Keep a Diary

Writing down the foods that you eat and symptoms you have after eating can help identify the foods that cause gas. Avoiding or eating less of these foods may help reduce gas symptoms.

Make Dietary Changes

People may be able to reduce gas by eating less of the foods that cause gas. However, many healthy foods may cause gas, such as fruits and vegetables, whole grains and milk products. The amount of gas caused by certain foods varies from person to person. Effective dietary changes depend on learning through trial and error which foods cause a person to have gas and how much of the offending foods one can handle.

While fat does not cause gas, limiting high-fat foods can help reduce bloating and discomfort. Less fat in the diet helps the stomach empty faster, allowing gases to move more quickly into the small intestine.

Take Over-the-Counter Medicine

These medicines can help reduce gas or the symptoms caused by gas.

- Alpha-galactosidase (Beano®) – This medicine contains the digesting enzyme that the body lacks to digest the sugar in beans and many vegetables. However, it has no effect on gas that may be caused by lactose or fiber. This product comes in different forms. Follow the directions on the label. It is important to take this medicine just before eating to help break down the gas-producing sugars in food.
- Simethicone (Gas-X®, Mylanta® Gas) – This medicine can relieve bloating and abdominal pain or discomfort caused by gas.
- Lactase tablets and drops can help people with lactose intolerance digest milk and milk products to reduce gas. Lactase tablets are taken just before eating foods that contain lactose; lactase drops can be added to liquid milk products. Lactose-free and lactose-reduced milk and milk products are available in most grocery stores.

Points to Remember

- Gas is air in the digestive tract.
- Gas in the digestive tract is usually caused by swallowing air and by the breakdown of certain foods by bacteria in the large intestine.
- Most foods that contain carbohydrates can cause gas. In contrast, proteins cause little gas.
- Eat healthy fats in moderation. High-fat meals may take longer to digest and can cause bloating.
- Foods that produce gas in one person may not cause gas for someone else.
- The most common symptoms of gas are burping, passing gas, bloating and abdominal pain or discomfort.

If you have any questions about your diet, talk with your registered dietitian at the Baptist MD Anderson Cancer Center.