



# Internally Yours<sup>®</sup>

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## Gas!

Among the most common intestinal symptoms are those attributed to “gas”, namely: belching, bloating and flatulence.

Intestinal gas consists mainly of nitrogen, carbon dioxide and methane; small amounts of hydrogen and sulfur-containing gases may also be present. Except for nitrogen, all of these are produced by bacteria within the intestinal tract.

**Belching.** Although excessive belching may occur in such conditions as delayed stomach emptying or intestinal obstruction, it rarely indicates a serious organic disease. In most cases, air expelled by belching is actually air that has just recently been swallowed. Most often excessive belching is caused by air swallowing, which may occur during exercise, eating, gum chewing or during periods of anxiety.



**Bloating.** Occasional symptoms of abdominal bloating and cramping are often due to excessive intestinal gas, but the occurrence of frequent or severe attacks may indicate that there is also a disorder of intestinal motility present. Normally, the intestinal muscles move

waste and gas through the intestinal tract in an orderly fashion. Sometimes, however, the intestinal contents may move along too quickly. When this occurs, some areas of the intestine may resist this rapid passage by going into spasm. In so doing, the intestines effectively produce a temporary blockage. Intestinal waste and gas cannot pass through, become backed up, causing the muscles of the intestine to become stretched, which in turn results in cramping and pain. The most common example of this is the **irritable bowel syndrome** (“spastic colon”). In this condition, the abnormal intestinal muscle activity may cause symptoms even when intestinal gas is present in normal amounts. Nonetheless, reducing intestinal gas production is often effective in relieving symptoms.

**Excessive flatus.** Excessive passage of gas per rectum is directly related to the diet and to digestion. Nearly all of our digestion occurs in the small intestine. Anything not digested in the small intestine is sent to the colon (large intestine) for disposal. The colon contains



bacteria, which use our waste matter as their own food. The result of bacterial digestion is the production of gas and water. The increased gas causes bloating and flatulence, and the increased water may cause diarrhea.

Excessive gas may occur in conditions of incomplete digestion, when foods that we normally digest travel through the small intestine and reach the colon, where bacterial action results in increased gas production. Faulty digestion may occur in diseases of the pancreas, infections and other inflammatory conditions of the small intestine, and in other hereditary and acquired conditions. A common example is **lactose intolerance**, where the ability to digest milk products is impaired, rendering the individual susceptible to gas, cramping and diarrhea whenever dairy products are ingested.

Even in healthy individuals, certain foods are notorious for causing excessive gas. These foods are high in “fiber”, which is another term for sugars and starches which we cannot digest, and which therefore end up in the colon where they are digested by bacteria, leading to increased gas production. Well-known examples of such foods are baked beans, prunes, bran and cabbage.

