

# CONSUMING NEWS

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## Fiber and Your Colon (The Scoop on Poop)

By Christine Jeffers

We are going to have to get very personal – there's just no way around it when addressing the relationship between fiber and colon health. It's definitely one of those subjects that few lay people are comfortable discussing. So brace yourself because we are going to talk about the scoop on poop.

The health of our colons can affect the status of our total health. Ailments such as cold sores, constipation, diarrhea, acne, vaginitis, headaches, eczema, and yeast infections can be attributable to colon health. Diseases of the colon such as Diverticulitis (inflammation of the colon), IBS (irritable bowel syndrome), and hemorrhoids have all been related to a low fiber diet. In fact, Diverticulitis is one of the most common age-related disorders of the colon and in North America, one third of all those over age 45 will suffer from this disease.

One of the biggest problems with colon health awareness is that people tend to ignore the character of their personal bowel movements. This is a big mistake, because BM's can be a great indicator for determining the health status of your colon. If you're getting enough fiber in your diet, the stool forms in the colon with undigested fiber and the colon removes remaining water to form a soft stool which moves toward the rectum in a gentle wave-like motion (peristalsis). If you do not eat enough fiber, the stool becomes hard and dry and sticks to the walls of the colon.

Hard, dry stools cause the colon to move the stool in a high pressure motion, which is unhealthy for the colon. Eventually the abdominal muscles will contract, because the colon cannot move the hard dry stool by itself – this is referred to as "straining". Straining produces pressure and can lead to hernias, hiatus hernias and hemorrhoids. A normal bowel movement should not involve any effort or straining.

An ideal BM leaves the body easily with no straining or discomfort, is medium brown in color, should have the consistency of toothpaste, and be approximately 4 to 8 inches long. The discharge should enter the water smoothly, falling slowly; there should be little gas or odor.

You should experience a bowel movement everyday. The longer the stool remains in your colon, the longer toxins, which should have been eliminated, remain in your colon and are reabsorbed by the body. Constipation is toxic and can lead to painful bloating, chronic headaches, and skin rashes. A diet with adequate fiber intake should be considered to avoid constipation and other such disorders.

Fiber promotes the 'wavelike' contractions which help ingested foods move through the intestine; it soaks up water and mixes with the stool, giving it shape and keeping it soft. When adding more

### Great Fiber Foods

Apples, Blueberries, Oranges, Pears, Strawberries, Dried Apricots, Dates, Figs, Peaches, Plums, Raisins, Legumes, Nuts, Seeds, Oatmeal, Barley, Wheat Bran, Brown Rice, Whole Grain & Wheat Cereals, Breads, Pasta, Artichokes, Broccoli, Carrots, Cauliflower, Peas, Potatoes (with skin)



fiber to your diet, also be mindful to consume adequate amounts of water; otherwise the stool will not have water to mix with, and you will end up with a dry, hard stool. If your diet has consisted of processed, high refined foods, you want to slowly introduce fiber to your diet, and be sure to chew your food. Most processed, high refined foods can be broken down in the stomach because they are already broken down during processing, but foods high in fiber are broken down when we chew them. If you notice gas and bloating after eating foods high in fiber it may be caused by inadequate chewing.

Fiber also feeds the healthy bacteria in your colon which inhibit the growth of harmful bacteria, promotes good digestion, boosts immune function, and increases resistance to infection. A diet with little fiber can lead to a large amount of bad bacteria in the colon which can produce cold sores, constipation, diarrhea, acne, vaginitis, headaches, symptoms of hypoglycemia, and yeast infections.

Currently, there is no official recommended daily allowance (RDA) for fiber, however the nutritional rule of thumb is: 25-30 grams of fiber each day for adults. The average American eats only 15 grams of fiber a day. The relationship between colon health and fiber intake is important. Stay mindful of what goes in and what goes out.

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## The Price of Gas

By Dr. Cathy Kapica

It's the thing that babies are praised for doing, and that very old people may be excused from, but the rest of us find uncomfortably embarrassing. In polite company we refer to it as gas, but, alright, I'll say it, I'm talking about farts. Yes, it can be humorous, as has been depicted in a variety of comedy scenes. And we call it by a number of names - "cut the cheese," "tooting," and so on. Interestingly enough, the word, 'fart', has been around for a very long time, coming from an ancient Greek word meaning 'to break wind'.

### What causes gas?

The technical term is flatulence, which is a mixture of gases from swallowed air and gas produced within the digestive tract. Gas production is a sign of a well-functioning digestive tract and healthful diet. About 10-30% of starches we consume escape the normal digestive process. Once these reach the lower large intestine, the bacteria that live there take over. They feast on this food coming their way, and release gases. Any carbohydrate containing food can cause gas, although some foods are notorious for their gas-producing ability. Beans top the list, but others include peas, lentils, dairy products, onions, garlic, scallions, leeks, radishes, sweet potatoes, cashews, Jerusalem artichokes, bananas, bagels, oats and wheat. Because of the type of carbohydrate they contain, called oligosaccharides, the human body doesn't produce the enzymes to break these down. In the case of those with lactose intolerance, intestinal bacteria feeding on lactose can give rise to excessive gas production when milk is consumed. The average human produces about a quart of gas per day, in 15-20 releases per day. We produce more gas after meals, and less during sleeping than during waking. But if you hold it in during the day, when your body relaxes at night it will be released.

### What makes that sound?

Farts are expelled under pressure through the anus which is kept closed by a muscle called the anal sphincter. Gas is released when the gas pressure inside the rectum exceeds the anal sphincter's ability to restrain it. The noise made on release is caused by the vibration of the anal sphincter, and can be affected if the buttocks are closed. Depending upon if the sphincter is relaxed or tense, and the positions of the buttocks, this often results in a trumpeting sound, but gas can also be passed quietly. Adolescent males are particularly adept (and well known for) their musical ability when expelling farts.

### What makes that smell?

The gas released during a fart frequently has a foul odor. Flatulence odor can be caused by the presence of large numbers of gut bacteria and/or the presence of feces in the rectum. Cauliflower, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage and other cruciferous vegetables are commonly reputed to not only increase flatulence, but to increase the pungency of the flatus.

### What can we do to stay in 'polite company'?

The foods that cause gas are some of the healthiest for us, so don't stay away. Here are some tips to minimize gas production without decreasing nutrition.

\* When preparing beans, soak them first in water, rinse, and then cook them. Rinsing them first helps remove some of the indigestible carbohydrate.

\* Sugar free candy and gum often contains sugar substitutes called sugar alcohols, including sorbitol, mannitol, and xylitol. Bacteria in the lower intestine love to make gas from these so don't go overboard.

\* If you are not used to eating foods with fiber, introduce them slowly at first. The body adjusts over time. Be sure to increase your fluids as well.

\* Probiotics, also known as live active cultures, can help reduce flatulence by restoring balance to the normal gut bacteria. Those with lactose intolerance can often tolerate yogurt.

\* There are digestive enzyme supplements on the market which also help reduce the gas produced by foods like beans.

It also helps to eliminate the swallowed air. I found this particular mantra very helpful during pregnancy, a time when there is much less room in the abdomen for comfort: 'Better to belch and bear the shame than squelch the belch and bear the pain'.

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