



What's Going On?

That growing baby is wreaking havoc in your tummy. Here's how to deal with gas, bloating, and other, um...issues. **By Judi Ketteler**

I spent the first ten weeks of my pregnancy trying to burp and the next six weeks trying to do number two—all the while having gas that rivaled that of ten men drinking beer and eating chili-cheese fries and bean dip. On any given day, my pregnant belly was more volatile than a science fair volcano. That's because pregnancy—all 40 weeks of it—can make your gastrointestinal system feel as if it's under attack.

"The influx of the pregnancy hormone progesterone causes the muscles in your GI tract to relax," says Roger Harms, MD, associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology at Mayo Medical School. That means they don't push through food

as efficiently. "Instead of a day's worth of food in your intestines, you might have three days' worth," Dr. Harms says, which can leave you feeling bloated and gassy. It doesn't stop there: your body needs fluid to make the extra blood required for building and maintaining the placenta, so it absorbs every last drop of water in the food. The lack of water in your intestines is the main reason for constipation.

GAS ATTACK

Certain foods cause gas, and too much gas can cause bloating and cramping. Beans, fruits, vegetables,

and carbonated beverages are some of the obvious culprits. But that's not all: artificial sweeteners (especially those in sugar-free gum and diet soda), sugar, dairy, and bread products can also create gas. You can't just stop eating everything, obviously, because you want to maintain a balanced diet. Plus, not all gas is created equal. "Every woman's system is different," says

Drinking water can solve a lot of GI problems.

Laura Riley, MD, author of *Pregnancy: Your Ultimate Week-by-Week Pregnancy Guide*. "What works for you may not work for someone else," she adds. The glass of Sprite that causes your best friend

to have gas may be just what you need to burp. You might also look to alternatives, such as probiotics (good bacteria thought to help with digestion). If you can stomach dairy, simply eat a carton of yogurt, which contains the probiotic *acidophilus*.



If coffee is part of your daily routine, no need to give it up. One cup a day can help with constipation.

Jen Hinton, who runs the parenting blog *poshpointofview.com*, had horrible cramping during the first 24 weeks of her pregnancy. She discovered that apples were one of the causes, but because she was craving them, she didn't want to cut them out completely. That's a good strategy, Dr. Riley says. "Rather than cutting things out, just try going easy on them," she says. Also, slow down at meals—eating too quickly makes you swallow a lot of air, which gets trapped as gas. Keep in mind that the foods that trigger gas change by trimester, as the baby gets bigger and your body adapts to the higher levels of progesterone. So, although onions may have caused problems in your first trimester, they may not in your second.

ROADBLOCK TO THE SOUTH

Don't be surprised if you get gas under control only to have constipation set in. Many of the foods you avoid because they cause gas are the very ones you need to keep your bowels regular—especially fiber. Fiber is a natural stool softener because fiber-filled foods hold onto water longer, and anything you can

do to preserve water will help soften your stool. If fiber-filled foods give you gas, try Citrucel or something similar; it's a fiber product (you just add it to water) that doesn't make you feel bloated and is safe for pregnant women.

Prenatal vitamins can keep you backed up because of the iron they contain. "Talk to your doctor about skipping them for a few weeks if

you're suffering from constipation," Dr. Riley says.

The number-one thing you can do to minimize constipation is to drink a lot of water, which, like fiber, acts as a stool softener. If water is unappealing in the first trimester, try eating water-rich things that are easier to stomach, like Popsicles, lemon with crushed ice, cucumbers, and watermelon. Over-the-counter stool softeners also help to hold water in your intestines, but often they're not enough for genuine constipation. "I recommend a maintenance approach: take them before you're really constipated," Dr. Harms says, because once your bowels are really backed up, the softeners may not be very effective.

Though it gets a bad rap, caffeine—in moderation—can also get things moving, Dr. Riley says. "A cup of coffee is fine."

MOVE YOUR MUSCLES

Aside from diet, you also need to move your body. Exercise—such as cardio, Pilates, yoga, or strength-

If Diet Changes Don't Work

Jacqueline Wolf, MD, often recommends these OTC remedies to pregnant patients, though she advises checking with your doctor first.

» **Ginger capsules** For some people, ginger helps with nausea and digestion.

» **Gas-X** This breaks up gas bubbles in your stomach and intestines so you don't feel so bloated.

» **Peppermint tea** Peppermint is a natural digestive aid and may help with cramps and gas. However, avoid it if you have heartburn.

» **Pepogest** These peppermint-oil capsules have a coating that keeps the capsule from dissolving until it reaches your intestines. They're less likely to give you heartburn than peppermint tea is.

» **Colace** This is a gentle stool softener.

training—helps tremendously. It forces you to shift your body position, which both stimulates your bowels and helps break up those gas pockets, says gastroenterologist Jacqueline Wolf, MD, an associate professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School. Exercise also increases blood flow. “It’s all about doing things that encourage the muscle contractions that move food through your intestines in your GI tract,” says maternal-fitness expert Cathy Cram.

Blogger Jen Hinton found that even though it was hard to get motivated to exercise (since she didn’t feel well), movement did soothe her gas cramps. It didn’t have to be anything too rigorous. “What helped alleviate the cramping was wading in the pool or taking a brisk walk around the corner,” she says. To relieve cramps, Cram also recommends lying on your left side and doing a gentle clockwise abdominal massage, beginning from the outside and spiraling slowly inward.

Whatever exercise you do, don’t skimp on drinking water. “Hydration is critically important,” Cram says. And when doing cardio, pay attention to what you eat before you exercise. You need to fuel your workout, but remember that your food is already metabolizing more slowly, so you may have to adjust your pre-workout snack. Thirty minutes before you exercise, have a lean protein snack that has only a small amount of fat, such as half a turkey sandwich (hold the mayo) or an egg with a piece of fruit. “Keep experimenting to see what works for you,” she says.

And remember, at the end, you get to trade in those gassy black beans for a little bean of your own.

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