

Flatulence in Dogs

Oh, that smell! If you've ever lived with a Bulldog or Boxer you'll know what I'm talking about, but you don't have to belong to the snub-nosed breed crowd to have experienced the worst kind of room-clearing flatulence. This is especially true if your pet happens to suffer from certain chronic gastrointestinal disorders.

I don't recall this topic getting treated in much depth back in vet school despite its prevalence. The flashier subjects of diarrhea and vomiting always overshadowed "intestinal gas" in the category of GI ailments.

And while that's understandable (both diarrhea and vomiting are arguably more dramatic events) flatulence needn't be ignored. It too deserves to be treated with respect. After all, pets who suffer from it aren't just distressing you with their stench; their alimentary tracts are telling us something about how they're processing the foods we feed them.

Is Gas in Dogs Normal?

Make no mistake: Flatulence is perfectly normal and physiologically appropriate in almost all cases. That's the "good" part the title refers to. After all, every mammal lives in symbiotic harmony with the bacteria in its digestive system. These are the gut's co-digesters, which release gas during their normal course of their nutrient processing duties.

But even when it's normal, flatulence is rarely a welcome punctuation to our pets' post-prandial slumber. Indeed, it's no more comfortable to them than what happens to us humans after a bowl of 3-alarm chili or a plate overflowing with beans and rice. To be sure, flatulence is normal, but when it's excessive it's time for taking action.

Unfortunately Beano isn't on the menu. My internal medicine colleagues described the use of this over-the-counter remedy for humans as "probably non-toxic but likely not helpful." Sure, that's not scientifically tested, but it's not a ringing endorsement either.

So what *does* help?

What Causes "Gas" or Flatulence in Dogs?

Not so fast ... Before all else, a diagnosis is probably in order. Why exactly is there so much nasty gas coming out the business end of nature's most efficient composter? Here's a short list of possibilities:

Is there too much gas going in?

- Gulping food down causes excess ingestion of air
- Chewing certain toys or rawhide-style chews may cause inappropriate ingestion of air
- Certain respiratory ailments can lead to excess gas ingestion

How about too much gas production inside the digestive tract?

- Dietary intolerances

- True food allergies (though uncommon, it's always a possibility)
- Bacterial overgrowths secondary to dietary indiscretion (aka "garbage gut")
- Chronic bowel diseases (as diverse as parasitism and cancers)
- Pancreatic disorders (exocrine pancreatic insufficiency in particular)

To determine the cause of the gas, methods such as stool checks, bloodwork, X-rays, and ultrasound are the standard. But sometimes endoscopy (including colonoscopy), abdominal exploratory surgery, and even CT scans are required to get to the bottom of it. Yes, even flatulence disorders can be hard to diagnose.

Most of us stop short of more invasive methods when it comes to something as seemingly innocuous as gas. Nonetheless, severe or worsening conditions often warrant more aggressive diagnostic tests to determine the underlying cause.

What Can You do to Treat "Gas" or Flatulence in Your Dog?

For most common gas issues, however, I like to try the simple tricks they never taught us in vet school. Here's a list of methods that are worth a try, best employed after your vet's done her basic workup and can't find an obvious source of the dilemma:

#1 A Change of Diet

Is some ingredient giving your dog gas? Just like people, pets can be intolerant of proteins and/or carbohydrates. Simply picking out a new diet has worked for many pets, but beware: always make diet changes slowly by carefully and gradually mixing in the new food with the old for a week.

For pets with possible food allergies or severe dietary intolerances, a diet containing novel proteins and carbohydrates (or a hydrolyzed protein) is often recommended. Switching to a therapeutic diet recommended by your veterinarian might make all the difference.

#2 Feed Your Dog Smaller or Moister Meals

Some pets are simply pigs, gulping mouthfuls of air along with their food. Slowing the process down helps and frequent smaller feedings is one way to accomplish this. And don't forget to check out the chewing action. If your pet is gulping as she goes you'll want to make some changes. Wetting the food might help here, too.

#3 Probiotics for Dogs

Some pets respond to the simple addition of yogurt (preferably laced with extra acidophilus cultures) but some commercial pet probiotics have been formulated specifically to provide the kinds of "good" bacteria that live in the digestive systems of cats and dogs.

#4 Charcoal for Dogs

Apparently, some gastrointestinally-focused internal medicine specialists will recommend charcoal tablets to speed nasty bacteria through the GI tract. I've never tried it but, considering

how safe charcoal is, it might be worth a shot for those of you at your wits' end.

#5 Simethicone for Dogs

Simethicone is the active ingredient in Gas-Ex, a super-safe human product we veterinarians occasionally prescribe. Despite its safety, though, you should always check with your vet since it may not be his or her first choice.

In fact, everything I've just offered in the post above should serve as a basis for questions to ask your veterinarian and should not be taken as gospel. Until you get their approval you'll just have to resort to exiting the room the next time your pet "bombs it."

So what are you waiting for? Go ask your veterinarian for help dispensing with olfactory discomfort once and for all.

I hope this article gives you some tips for dealing with your dogs flatulence.

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