

Ettinger & Feldman – Textbook of Veterinary Internal Medicine

Client Information Sheet

Flatulence

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What is flatulence?

Flatulence refers to the anal passage of intestinal gas. It is also known by many other names, including “farting,” “passing wind,” and “passing gas.” Flatulence more commonly affects dogs than cats and is most often observed in inactive dogs that spend long periods indoors.

What causes flatulence?

It is normal for dogs to pass gas in small quantities at infrequent intervals. However, persistent passage of excessive quantities of gas is abnormal. Excessive flatulence usually results from intolerance of one or more components of the pet’s diet. This intolerance is most often due to the feeding of a diet of inferior quality containing ingredients of poor digestibility. These ingredients pass through the intestinal tract without being absorbed and end up in the large intestine (colon and rectum), where bacteria ferment them to produce gas. Some of these gases do not smell; whereas others, particularly those derived from the fermentation of proteins and fats, smell badly.

Flatulence can also occur when a dog eats excessive quantities of food, overwhelming the ability of its gastrointestinal tract to digest the food. Furthermore, some dogs are born without the ability to digest certain ingredients in their diets. For example, many dogs and cats have trouble digesting lactose in milk. Other dogs have trouble digesting some legumes such as soy. Fortunately, flatulence resulting from legumes can be successfully reduced by a variety of manufacturing techniques.

Another cause of flatulence is greedy eating resulting in the ingestion of large quantities of air. Once ingested, air has to be removed from the gastrointestinal tract either by burping or by flatulence.

What treatment is needed?

The management of flatulence begins with a change to a high-quality (highly digestible) diet without excess fat content. Suitable commercial products are available from most of the major manufacturers. Alternatively, owners can prepare a homemade diet composed of highly digestible protein and carbohydrate sources such as cottage cheese and rice appropriately balanced with vitamins and minerals. Homemade diets are less desirable than commercial diets because their long-term use is often associated with nutritional deficiencies or excesses.

Other steps to help reduce flatulence include the following:

- Ensuring regular exercise to promote regular defecation
- Reducing the dog's gulping of air by avoiding situations that provoke nervousness
- Discouraging greedy eating (i.e. in multiple dog situations, feed the dogs in separate areas so no food competition is perceived)

In the rare event that dietary manipulation is not successful in controlling flatulence, call your veterinarian, because a diagnostic investigation of your pet's digestive system may be required. Alternatively, your veterinarian may suggest a trial with medications that reduce gas production by assisting digestion, absorbing gas, or assisting the passage of gas.

Contacts for Further Information



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