

Ballooning

Most people with a stoma will have experienced ballooning. In this guide, we explain what causes it and ways to prevent it.

What is ballooning?

‘Ballooning’ is when gas builds up inside your colostomy or ileostomy bag and cannot escape, so it inflates like a balloon. This can cause the bag to break or detach, potentially leading to leakage and skin problems. It can also cause odour, noises and make your pouch more visible. This might cause stress and self-consciousness.

What causes ballooning?

Every time we eat or drink, we swallow a bit of air. It’s what causes burping and farting, along with food that hasn’t digested fully and has fermented in your colon. With a stoma, farts don’t exit the way they used to. Instead, this gas collects in your pouch and you can’t control it. Most pouches have a filter to let air out, but they can sometimes stop working, causing ballooning to happen. This might be because it is wet or blocked by your stoma output. It can also happen if there is too much gas for the filter to handle.

In the early days after stoma surgery, you will probably experience a lot of gas. This will settle down with time. Many ostomates also report that they experience ballooning at night.

Equipment tips to control ballooning

- Use the filter cover (the little sticker) that comes with your pouching system when washing/swimming to stop water blocking the filter.
- If you use a two-piece system or a drainable bag, you can gently “burp” the bag in a controlled way to release air. This can help if your bag balloons at night, but be careful not to accidentally cause a leak (sitting up to do it will help).





- Change or empty your pouch just before you go to sleep.
- You may need to change your appliance more often. Filters become less effective over time.
- If the problem persists, try a different pouching system with a better filter.
- A support garment or high-waisted pants will keep your pouch hidden even if it balloons.
- If you are worried about odour, you can purchase gel/drops/sprays to neutralise it.

Eating habits to control ballooning

- Eat slowly and chew everything thoroughly; eating quickly makes you swallow more air.
- Let fizzy drinks go flat before drinking them.
- Avoid drinking through straws.
- Eat regularly and try not to go for long stretches without food.
- If you're struggling with ballooning at night, plan your meals so that you don't eat close to bedtime. It might help to make your mid-day meal your 'main' meal of the day and have a smaller evening meal.
- Drink peppermint tea or peppermint-infused drinks.
- Eat natural yoghurt to support gut bacteria.
- Avoid high gas-producing foods (see below).

However, everyone's body reacts differently, so what affects one ostomate might not affect you. That's why it's worth keeping a food diary. Track what you eat and any symptoms you experience so you can spot patterns.

Foods that can cause gas

| | | |
|-------------|---------------|---------|
| Beans | Fizzy drinks | Lentils |
| Sprouts | Sweetcorn | |
| Spicy food | Green bananas | |
| Garlic | | |
| Onions | Leeks | |
| Seeds | Peas | |
| Chewing gum | | |



Conclusion

If you are having major ballooning issues, speak to your stoma nurse or GP who can support you by making product recommendations or highlighting changes you should make to your diet.



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