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FEATURES EDITOR SUZY FLEMING LEONARD, sfleming@flatoday.net or 242-3614

Emission control

Everyone gets gas, but you can minimize the effects

BY BILLY COX
FLORIDA TODAY

At trafon.blogspot.com — one of the more amusing and informative Web sites in cyberspace — host Bill Downs is the master of what he calls “The Last Taboo.” This is where eclectic perspectives on what polite society refers to as “passing gas” assumes almost scholarly proportions. For example:

- Beans are popularly referred to as musical fruit because they contain complex sugars that are too unwieldy to pass easily through the small intestine walls, thus falling prey to bacteria that process them in often audible aerosols of carbon dioxide and methane.

- 19th century French entertainer Joseph “Le Petomane” Pujol toured Europe many times by learning to direct his emissions into eerie imitations of musical instruments, animals and popular tunes.

- The average person passes gas 14 times a day, enough to theoretically fill up a half-liter bottle.

- Believing the deliberate withholding of flatus to be unhealthy, Roman Emperor Claudius legalized the breaking of wind at banquets.

“The phenomena of flatulence, throughout history,” Downs notes, “has been more prevalent in the most affluent parts of cultures, the ones with the most access to pies, cakes, sauces, gravies.”

But in the 21st century of globalization, where industrial agriculture and junk-food empires ensure a more egalitarian access to culinary decadence once reserved for upper castes, the portentous rise of obesity — especially in the West



— represents just the most visible side effects of self-indulgence. With holiday feasts hitting full stride, the weather inside (i.e., breaking wind) could be as frightful as anything Jack Frost is doing outside.

“Between Howard Stern and some of the other scatological humor out there,” Downs says from his home outside Philadelphia, “we’ve gone to a place in our culture of caricaturing a problem we need to be taking a lot more seriously.”

“Never in the history of our species have we become so addicted to fatty, calorie-rich, nutrient-depleted, refined processed foods. And as we approach the holidays, what we’re eating — say, combining proteins with sweets —

See GAS, 5E

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Bill Downs,
host, trafon.blogspot.com

What you can do to prevent the unspeakable

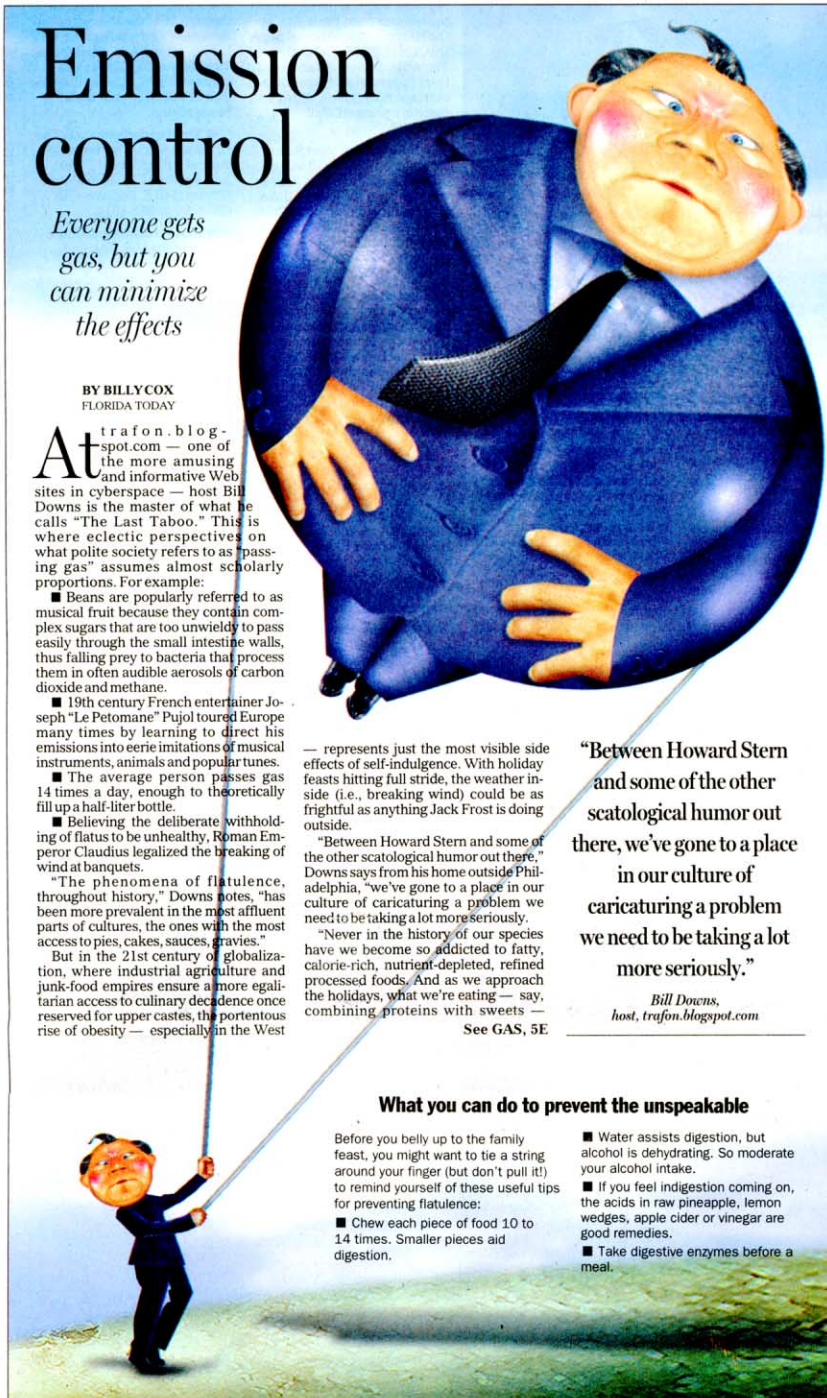
Before you belly up to the family feast, you might want to tie a string around your finger (but don’t pull it!) to remind yourself of these useful tips for preventing flatulence:

- Chew each piece of food 10 to 14 times. Smaller pieces aid digestion.

- Water assists digestion, but alcohol is dehydrating. So moderate your alcohol intake.

- If you feel indigestion coming on, the acids in raw pineapple, lemon wedges, apple cider or vinegar are good remedies.

- Take digestive enzymes before a meal.



Control gas by watching what you eat

GAS, from 1E

provides the ideal formula for dramatic and explosive moments.”

Downs, a nutritional biologist and author of peer-reviewed articles for medical journals, says chronic flatulence can not only reflect a digestive disorder, but a compromised immune system since “80 percent of the lymphatic tissue is in the (gastrointestinal tract).” Complicating matters further is food harvested in mineral-starved soil, or exposed to herbicides and pesticides.

The remedy — fresh, organically-grown vegetables — is easier said than done. And the holidays are no time for that. So what course of action should you take to gird yourself against the unspeakable wafting during Christmas feasts?

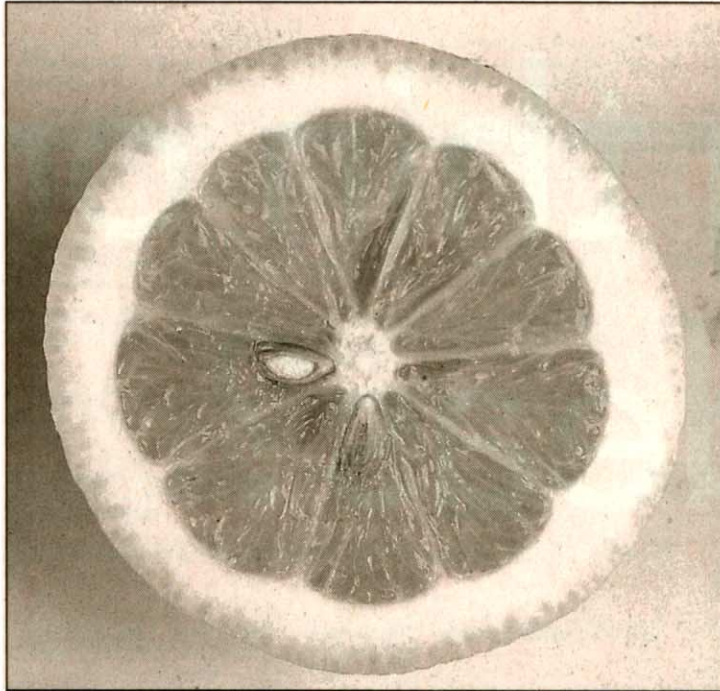
There’s charcoal-lined underwear to absorb malodorous emissions, says Downs, but he can’t attest to its effectiveness. Likewise, Richard Hendry, M.D., read about a device invented in England several years ago.

“The British are horrified of being embarrassed, so they came up with this thing that looked like a Walkman,” Hendry says. “It had a hose with a filter that you could insert in your problem area. But personally, I think charcoal underwear would be better than being hooked up to tubes.”

Hendry, a nutritional specialist at Wild Oats Community Market in Melbourne, says holiday bingeing poses unique gastrointestinal challenges because of the way we temporarily alter our eating patterns.

“The average person eats 12 to 14 different foods, except for the holidays,” he says. “How many times a year do you eat turkey and mashed potatoes? How many times do you eat spiral ham? Or smoked food?”

“We drink more alcohol and less water during the holidays. The more alcohol you drink, the more dehydrated you get, and dehydration affects our ability to compost properly. Also remember, we tend to get sick during the winter, and when we’re sick, we take antibiotics. Antibiotics kill all bacteria, even the good bacte-



FLORIDA TODAY file

Gas buster. Drinking a little lemon juice can help ease indigestion and reduce gas, thanks to the therapeutic power of the acids.

ria that help our digestion.”

So what’s a socially conscious windbreaker to do?

“Mastication — and be careful how you spell that — is a key component in the conveyor belt,” Hendry says. “You need to chew your food anywhere from 10 to 14 times, because the smaller the pieces, the easier it is to digest. It’s by far your best chance of avoiding an explosive social situation.”

If you feel a little indigestion coming on, Hendry suggests eating raw pineapple, or squeezing lemon wedges into a small cup of water to drink, thanks to the therapeutic power of the acids. Apple cider and vinegar also are useful tools. “They’ll break that rock right up,” he says.

Remember the catchy ad that everybody mimics, Beano? “Take this and there’ll Beano gas?” Beano really works, says Colleen Creamer, manager of Nature’s Market in Melbourne. And so do other things, like chewable ginger candy or tea, peppermint, papaya, fennel.

“What you need are full-range digestive enzymes if you’re going to have a great big meal. And not just Tums,” she says. “Tums just

neutralizes stomach acids. It doesn’t really address the problem, which is that you’re not getting enough digestive enzymes.”

Fortunately, you can take your pick of those digestive enzymes, adds Terry Toole, grocer manager at Paradise Health & Nutrition in Palm Bay.

“There are 40 or 50 kinds to choose from. It’s an individual thing. But they work, and it’s a good precaution.”

Is there a discreet way to inform the perpetrator that, while beans may be good for your heart, they’re peeling the paint off the veneer of the holiday reunion?

“That’s a tough one. It’s an unfortunate situation,” says Wild Oats’ Hendry. “I don’t think most of them are doing it deliberately, so it really isn’t their fault. I’m not sure there’s a polite way to (tell them), other than to leave the room or stand upwind.”

Downs has a solution on his Web site: Send the offender a “Gassy Greeting Card.” Says he: “It’s completely anonymous, and they’ll get the message.” ■

Contact Cox at 242-3774
or bc Cox@flatoday.net