

a.m. MAGAZINE

BLOGGERNAUT

Delving into digestive maladies, silly and serious

Bloggernaut

JESSICA BERTHOLD



Gone are the days of leaving an anonymous bottle of "Beano" on the desk of a whiffy co-worker or redolent relative. Now you need only suggest a visit to **Trafon** (www.trafon.blogspot.com), a blog that's both resource and support group for people with digestive woes (spell "Trafon" backwards and you'll get the idea.)

Sure, the subject matter may seem crude or distasteful, and the blog's cartoon of a derriere in mid-expulsion doesn't exactly elevate the discussion. Neither does the whoopee cushion sound that emerges when you load the homepage or the seventh-grade humor that peppers the writing.

Still, the info is often useful, and addresses a subject not frequently discussed. Indigestion and excessive flatulence is a serious problem for millions of people, and Trafon can be a help and comfort to them. Even for the unaffected, there are interesting tidbits on digestion and nutrition. Just make sure your computer's sound is turned off before you visit the site in public.

Q&A, BILL DOWNS, FOUNDER OF TRAFON BLOG

Bill Downs, a resident of Ledeford, Montgomery County, is president of Allied Nutraceutical Ingredients, which markets a mineral die-

tary supplement called SierraSil. He says his blog isn't a vehicle to plug his business, and makes a point to stress that he's not a doctor or a gastroenterologist.

Downs has taken graduate courses in Nutrition Science and Biological Chemistry, and has a B.S. in Business Administration from Penn State University.

Q: How did you get interested in this topic?

A: I worked in a doctor's office as a nutritionist in the early 1990s, and we used to have people fill out a questionnaire. I kept seeing people who had digestive maladies concomitant with other problems, and I began to see it was important to address the lifestyle issues that cause digestive problems.

Q: What kind of other health problems did they have?

A: All sorts of things, from cardiovascular disorders and inflammatory disorders to obesity.

Q: What's the blog's objective?

A: I want to get people to understand they should take digestion seriously. My mom died of colon cancer and my cousin of Crohn's disease, both within five years of each other. My mom never talked about this stuff. One day she hemorrhaged and then three weeks later, she was dead.

Q: How many people are afflicted with excessive gas?

A: Some 65-70 million Americans are affected by gastrointestinal disorders, and those are only the ones who get recorded because they have



Illustration by Spencer L. Brinkerhoff III

WWW.TRAFON.BLOGSPOT.COM

- **In a word:** Candid.
- **E-Candy for:** The digestively challenged, and those within smelling distance of them. Middle-school boys.
- **In Sum:** Discusses nutrition and digestion issues, with an emphasis on excessive gas.
- **This blog as a person:** Belch-prone Barney from "The Simpsons."
- **Sample topics:** Movie theater concessions that cause gas. The connection between cow belches and global warming. The origin of the term "P.U."
- **Classic post:** "Here's an interesting approach for dealing with unpleasant odors that arise from uncontrollable gas: Trap the puffers in underwear that has a built-in

activated charcoal filter." (Post, with link to article about filter: Dec. 7)

- **Making it happen:** Bill Downs, 54, president of Allied Nutraceutical Ingredients.
- **Created:** November.
- **Updates:** 3-4 times per week.
- **Writing:** Breezy and colloquial, laced with adolescent humor.
- **Design:** Functional. Colors and images (like anthropomorphic gas bubbles) fit the site's lighthearted tone.
- **Comments allowed?** Yes.
- **Popularity:** 700 hits in six weeks of existence.
- **Bloggernaut rating:** 7 (out of 10)

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drug prescriptions.

Q: Why the silly fart jokes and noises on the site?

A: I use humor as an entree to talk about a taboo subject. We need to raise this issue in a manner that takes the mystery and fear and stigma out of flatulence.

Q: Are you ever concerned this kind of humor might alienate people who are ashamed of their problem?

A: To have a purely scientific/health newsletter is going to fall into the blah-blah-blah realm of nutri-babble that everybody else is doing. Most of us initially laugh at humor, but if there something else we relate to, it gives us a twinge.

Q: Why do so many Americans have digestive problems?

A: We've asked for it with our convenience food, fast food, instant-gratification lifestyle. Other things create problems, too, like worry or stress.

Q: What are the most common foods that cause gas?

A: It depends on the individual and the strength of the GI tract. If someone is suffering chronic flatulence, they should avoid pizza and beer, because of the gluten and the carbohydrates, the alcohol, the wheat protein and dairy. Stay away from highly-refined, processed foods. Drink more water and stop drinking sodas, both because of the sugar content and carbonation.

Q: What's a normal amount of gas?

A: Normal would be to pass gas 10-20 times a day, including when

you are sleeping. So if you are passing gas 40-50 times a day, I would say you really have a digestive problem. But the issue isn't the gas per se, it's the diet, lifestyle and stress that are compromising the integrity of the metabolism and promoting the response.

Q: What should people eat for healthy digestion?

A: Shop the perimeter of the grocery store, where there is fresh produce and fruits, meat, poultry and whole grains. Buy organic produce. We all need to take supplements, because the foods produced by agribusiness aren't optimal for health. Add oatmeal, kasha, bulgar wheat, and steamed vegetables to your diet.