

Our resident expert on hot air offers a discourse on the inevitable result of Super Bowl celebrations: flatulence.

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Super Bowl: this party's a real gas

I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but the Super Bowl isn't all that it's cracked up to be.

In all of the hysteria over the Seattle Seahawks' first foray into the Super Bowl, most of us have forgotten the inevitable result of our collective celebrations: fat and flatulence.

Sure, you think passing wind is funny. I can hear the laughter now. Well, get it out of your system. It's all a bunch of hot air anyway.

Luckily, as a professional journalist, I was sent this urgent e-mail: "Beer. Wings. Fries. Chicken fingers. Pizza. Subs. Chips 'n' dips. Peanuts, pretzels, Cheetos,

Cheez-its ... and lots of soda."

So far the message sounded pretty good to me. But then came the warning, like a gurgling in the pit of your stomach.



Spencer Hatton

"Super Bowl party foods have an unspoken dark side

that's among society's last taboos: the unsportsmanlike flatulence that results from gastrointestinal distress."

Yes, that dreaded four-letter word. Thank goodness there's an expert on trouser trumpets to turn to and clear the air.

He's Bill Downs, who has his own "fart blog," the Internet's first-ever (are there more?). The blog, where Downs offers his knowledge of nutritional science and where readers can retort back, is designed for those of us who are hooked on buffalo wings to engage in a serious discussion on the root causes of digestive distress. In other words, to learn why people tend to do crop dusting at

parties.

Downs lays it on the line about food, refined or otherwise: "If it's white, it ain't right." In other words, lay off the cauliflower and the hard-boiled eggs. Better choices include celery, apples, peaches and berries.

But if Downs wants a real probing, cheek-to-jowl discussion over untimely gas discharges in public places, he might want to clean up his Web site.

I mean really, is it necessary to greet a visitor to his blog (www.Trafon.org) with the windy sound of flatulence and the sight of an animated cartoon character baring his buns in the act of digestive distress? Do these images encourage intellectual debate?

Smells funny to me, though I do like the fact that "Trafon," when spelled backward, underscores Downs' ultimate goal — a stinkier society.

Of course, I didn't need a pro on air biscuits to convince me that Americans are gluttons when it comes to Super Bowl Sunday. Everything we touch seems to turn to ... well, gas.

The amount of food we stuff down our gullets is staggering. Get a load of this: today Americans will eat 11.3 million pounds of potato chips.

That's the No. 1 treat. Next comes tortilla chips (8.5 million pounds), pretzels (4.1 million pounds) and nuts (2.7 million pounds).

According to the fine folks at the Snack Food Association, all of these appetizers will total some 30 million pounds. That lump sum is equal to — are you ready for this? — 4 million pounds of pure, unadulterated fat, the kind that

causes your \$39 souvenir Super Bowl T-shirt to fit a bit tighter over your gut.

Ugh!

Of course, we've all got to eat, right?

So I went to an authority on eating — Carol McKay, group leader in the Yakima Valley for Weight Watchers.

For her, the Super Bowl is packed not only with unwanted calories but memories of family gatherings where food, and lots of it, held sway.

While growing up in California,

her mother would spend days at the stove, toiling away in the kitchen for the big game. Her starting lineup of food was impressive: cooked ham, briskets of beef, slabs of cheese, bottomless bowls of chips and stacks of hard rolls for sandwiches.

These would all appear — like the Rolling Stones will do today — at halftime, when hunger would short-circuit common sense and plates would be loaded in heaping mounds, a pyramid of saturated fat.

Then, at the end of the Super Bowl, when TV cameras would scan the melee on the football field where muscular linebackers wept openly and confetti streamed down from impossible heights, McKay's mom would bring out the coup de grace: the desserts. A seven-layer tort, a strawberry confection, pecan pie and a black forest cake.

As a Weight Watchers' leader, McKay has put those days of gluttony behind her, as well as the 70 pounds she lost in 1990 and has kept off ever since. So when she gives advice about how to get through the Super Bowl without adding double digits to your body weight, take heed.

Here's her simple advice: Grab a bottle of water with your dominant hand and don't let go.

It's all about eating in moderation, and making smart choices. So when you enter a friend's house today and get handed a nine-piece bucket of the Colonel's finest, take the initiative. Reach for the veggie tray and dredge a baby carrot through a dip made of plain yogurt, not Hidden Valley Ranch dressing.

McKay would applaud. She knows eating can be both healthy and tasty. The Weight Watchers program has proven that. But on Super Bowl Sunday — what McKay calls the second most gluttonous day of the year next to Thanksgiving — that can be a challenge.

Which, of course, brings me back to Bill Downs and the explosion of intestinal gas he predicts will occur today. Could the gastric overload reach toxic levels?

In a panic, I called Les Ornelas, executive director of the Yakima Regional Clean Air Authority, and asked him if he will have extra crews out monitoring the air in our valley for ambient methane gas.

Not a chance, he said. Too dangerous. Besides, the air authority has no jurisdiction over what goes on inside someone's home.

You are on your own, he said.

So good luck, fellow Seattle fans, as we put our digestive systems through the wringer today. Enjoy the broccoli and the bean dip, and — oh, why not — break wind.

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