

Management of Abdominal Colic Due to Flatus

R. Vincent Davis, DC, PT, DNBPM

The pain of abdominal flatus (bowel gas) is usually exquisitely intense. The amount of intestinal gas varies from individual to individual and comes from aerophagia, gases in ingested foods, disaccharidase deficiency, and as a by-product of colonic bacterial activity. Some gas is normally absorbed from the intestine and the remainder is expelled as flatus.

In sufficient volume, gas in the colon may give rise to extreme pain and may be associated with anxiety states: abnormal swallowing functions, eating too rapidly and too much food. Other agitating factors include ingesting large volumes of liquids with meals, taking laxatives, and often the pain is a by-product of the chewing of gum.

Whatever the etiology, it should be isolated by the chiropractic physician and managed to the point of correction, if possible.

In the meantime, the application of heat to the abdomen will usually result in reflex relaxation of the musculature of the intestinal wall, allowing for relief of the trapped flatus and possibly overcoming some of the surface tension of the gas, allowing for its increased dispersal and discharge. The heating agent may be infrared (a heating pad) for home use, employing the moist form, advising the patient not to lie down on the pad, or by shortwave diathermy in the office setting.

Auscultation of the abdomen will usually reveal very active bowel sounds with abdominal distress generalized, unless there is other active intra-abdominal pathology occurring concomitantly, which results in localization of pain.

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