

Distention

Margie Petrakis, RN
Respiratory Therapist

Forbes Norris MDA/ALS Research Center

California Pacific Medical Center

Distention or that “gassy, bloaty feeling” is something we have all had, especially after a big holiday meal. When you eat a large meal, your stomach expands and presses up against your diaphragm. This can make you feel short of breath and fatigued after eating. Try some of these suggestions:

1. Eat four to six small meals per day instead of three bigger ones.
2. Take liquids one hour before or one hour after, rather than during the meal.
3. Eat slowly, in a leisurely, relaxed atmosphere. If you rush, or talk and chew at the same time, you swallow air.
4. Avoid using a straw, you swallow air with each sip.
5. Wear loose clothing, nothing that constricts you, causing discomfort.
6. If the feeling of fullness continues from one meal to the next, try to decrease fatty and fried foods as they take longer to leave the stomach. You may need medications to help with this problem.
7. Sit up for at least 30 minutes after a meal to aid in digestion.
8. If you use a non-invasive ventilator (BiPAP), the flows and or pressures may need to be turned down to decrease the likelihood of air going into the stomach. Talk to your doctor.
9. Consider getting a feeding tube that can simply be left open to vent the gas.
10. Fresh ginger tea might help.
11. Try a hot bath or use a heating pad or water bottle on your stomach.
12. Try lying on your left side for a while after using your non-invasive ventilator (BiPAP) all night.
13. Avoid gas-forming foods that cause discomfort:
 - Brussels sprouts, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, asparagus
 - Onions, radishes, garlic
 - Beans
 - Carbonated beverages
 - Excessive sweets, some fruit juices
 - Nutra-sweet
 - Apples, watermelon, cantaloupe, honeydew melons
 - Chewing gum

This may be done by trial and error, as some foods that bother one person won't bother the next.