

Extreme Flatulence Is Noxious, Embarrassing

DEAR DR. ROACH: In 2008, I had a partial sigmoid colectomy. Since then, I have had no recurrence of diverticulitis. The surgeon recommended that I not use laxatives, but rather take fiber gummies to keep things moving easily in addition to drinking lots of fluids.



I am doing that, but my flatulence could power all the homes in a small city. It is difficult to control outbursts, which are noxious and embarrassing in the extreme. Is there any other way to avoid hard stools, straining and other unhealthy gastrointestinal situations? -- J.S.

ANSWER: I am sorry for your embarrassment, but I agree with the surgeon that getting fiber and plenty of water is the safest and best way to prevent problems. However, maybe it isn't just the fiber, but your diet that is at least partially responsible for the increased gas. You could try reducing your intake of foods in the cabbage family, onions, beans, corn and other gas-producers. Avoid carbonated beverages and any beverage containing artificial sweeteners such as sorbitol or xylitol. In some people, changing the bacteria that live in your gut (your microbiome) through probiotic supplements and a change of diet can reduce the amount of gas produced.

There are other types of fiber supplements besides fiber gummies that might be better tolerated, or you can get fiber from food.

DEAR DR. ROACH: For 58 years, I've been walking around with a visible tracheostomy scar on my throat, leading the curious to ask: "Yuck. What happened there?" My answers have changed over the years, but were usually something like: "I was 4. A doctor had to cut my throat open so I could breathe." But now, I don't wait for the question. Lately, my scar has helped me do some show-and-tell about what causes this near-fatal closing of the windpipe and why doctors don't see kids dying from Haemophilus influenzae anymore. Could you elaborate? -- M.A.P.

ANSWER: Haemophilus influenzae (often called H. flu or Hib), despite its name, is not the cause of influenza (the "flu" is caused by a virus). H. flu is a species of bacteria that can cause meningitis, pneumonia and the condition you had, epiglottitis -- an inflammation of the epiglottis, the structure that closes your trachea when you swallow.

Before the vaccine for Hib became available, epiglottitis was a feared and not uncommon problem. Back then, doctors were exhaustively taught how to rapidly recognize the life-threatening H. flu epiglottitis so that children could be treated quickly, which sometimes meant an emergency tracheostomy (a direct hole through the throat into the windpipe to allow breathing). That is the procedure that caused the scar on your neck. Despite treatment, 3% to 6% of cases of invasive H. flu were fatal. Your scar may be yucky, but you are lucky to have survived.

During the time I was in medical school, routine vaccination for H. flu became widespread, and the disease essentially went away. History records a 99% drop in this infection. I've only ever seen one case. Essentially the only people at risk for this disease now are those who are deliberately unvaccinated.

Your story is important: Many people feel that the diseases we vaccinate against are "no big deal," but thousands of kids per year died of conditions we thankfully almost never see today. Without continued vaccination, those days will come back.

Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu.

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We Should Arm Taiwan to the Teeth

We warned China to stop its incursions into Taiwan's air defense identification zone -- and the Chinese responded by flying even more aircraft into the zone.

The 56 Chinese flights last Monday brought the total for October to 149, already the year's highest monthly total.

The flights have been steadily increasing in recent years, as Beijing harries Taiwan and demonstrates its discontent with the island nation's closer relationship to the United States. The Chinese may also want to wear down the Taiwanese by forcing them to constantly respond.

Regardless, the flights underscore why Taiwan is the most dangerous and potentially most consequential flashpoint on Earth.

If China can successfully absorb Taiwan while limiting the military, economic, and diplomatic costs, it would vindicate President Xi's vision of an ascendant China undoing past humiliations, represent a milestone in China's campaign to establish hegemony in the most important region of the world, and, perhaps, collapse the credibility and global position of the United States.

On the other hand, a debacle in Taiwan could have devastating economic and diplomatic consequences for China, threatening Xi's rule.

In other words, attention must be paid -- the trajectory of the modern world is conceivably at stake.

The Trump administration began to reorient the U.S. defense posture toward this threat, and the Biden administration has followed up, most importantly, with the nuclear submarine deal with Australia.

It's been completely obvious for a long time that China has been preparing, if it so chooses, to take Taiwan by force of arms, and keep us from being able to do anything about it.

It has massively increased its force of ballistic missiles, better to target a wide array of ships and hold at risk U.S. ground units. Prior to the latest, more serious iteration of the missile threat, Tom Shugart of the Center for New American Security estimated that a preemptive Chinese strike on our bases in the region "could crater every runway and runway-length taxiway at every major U.S. base in Japan, and destroy more than 200 aircraft on the ground."

China has been churning out long-range strike aircraft and engaged in a historic naval buildup. It now has the largest navy in the world.

Nonetheless, invading and occupying Taiwan after launching a gigantic, logistically taxing amphibious operation across a 110-mile strait would be no small feat, to put it mildly.

It should be our objective to keep China at bay, toward the goal of keeping it from establishing its dominance over Asia, as former Trump defense official Elbridge Colby argues in his compelling new book "The Strategy of Denial."

But the Taiwanese haven't exhibited the urgency one would expect of an island of 24 million people coveted by a nearby nation of 1.4 billion people that makes no secret of its compulsion to try to swallow it whole.

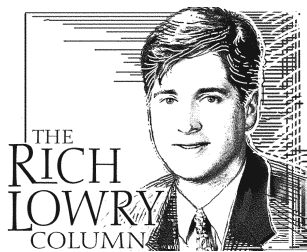
Until a few years ago, Taiwan's defense budget was shockingly inadequate. Its military reserves are lackluster. Its front-line units tend not to operate at full strength. It has often been seduced by the allure of so-called prestige weapons, such as top-end fighter aircraft that are irrelevant to its predicament.

We should be fortifying Taiwan and making it as difficult as possible for China to take. That means stockpiling food, energy and munitions against a Chinese blockade. It means making its infrastructure more resilient and enhancing its cyber capabilities. It means increasing its capability to detect an early mustering of Chinese forces. It means more mines, anti-ship missiles, air-defense capabilities and unmanned systems to frustrate a cross-strait invasion.

The Chinese have been focused on "area denial," missiles and the like to deny our access to Taiwan and its environs. But these capabilities can be turned against China, too.

If we are ever inclined to forget about how pressing the threat is, not to worry, the Chinese will have more flights or other provocations to remind us.

Rich Lowry is editor of the National Review.
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Woody Woodpecker Is Not Laughing

Unless you're a member of the Audubon Society, you're about to learn more about woodpeckers than you ever thought you'd know. Or care to.

I hate those detective shows where they say, "I'm sorry for your loss." But yeah, it's like that. I'm REALLY sorry for your loss because, I don't know how to break it to you, but Woody Woodpecker is dead. He's been officially declared extinct by a biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which keeps track of such things. Amy Trahan wrote the official report on the demise of the ivory-billed woodpecker -- the species that was the model for Universal Studios' character Woody, of "Heh-heh-heh-HEH-heh" fame. He (or she) is not to be confused with the pileated woodpecker, which makes more of a jackhammer sound as he scrounges for bugs (don't we all) in a tree's bark.

This is the genuine Woody, an ivory-billed. He hasn't been seen, that we know of, since back in 2005 in Arkansas. He (or she) was unmistakable. He was a big bird. In fact, (choose your pronoun) was nicknamed "The Lord God Bird," because when people saw one they'd exclaim, "Lord God! What a bird!"

But 2005 was the last time and long enough. "He no longer exists," said Ms. Trahan. And she checked the box for "delist based on extinction."

Since 1973, when Congress passed the Endangered Species Act, 54 plants and animals have been delisted, but millions more are expected in the coming decade. That's because of various human abuses, including hunting, property development, mining and the biggie, the double-C, climate change.

Oh, thank heaven, you were worrying that I was writing an ornithology column, not a political one. But here I am on familiar turf, where everyone agrees that global warming is an urgent problem, a disaster, actually, except for the miners, energy conglomerates, all the other special interests and the mealy-mouthed politicians who represent constituencies they rely on to get them re-elected instead of trying to save the entire planet.

Woody is just a canary in a coal mine -- more like a woodpecker, really -- a warning of pending doom. How about record-setting heat waves, hurricanes, floods and massive droughts at the same time, and glaciers falling off and slush where frozen oceans used to be?

One problem is that climate is worldwide; it's not a national issue. If one country decides to ignore it or doles out a weak response, particularly if motivated by economic concerns, another country cannot make up for it. If a demagogue leader can't see the political or fundraising benefit of going against powerful special interests, the cheap shot artist can easily ridicule what's necessary to reverse climate change.

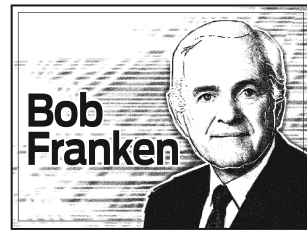
Donald Trump spewed carbon over the entire concept. Joe Biden turned around most of what Trump did, but it wasn't nearly enough to change the relentless heating up of Earth. That is going to take genuine sacrifice or ingenuity.

Otherwise, by midcentury -- mid THIS century -- our cities will be flooded with the melt from nonfrozen tundras far away, that are nowhere near as distant. And at the same time, the desert will be expanded.

Unless we take meaningful action -- and by "meaningful" I mean universal solar and wind energy, along with hydrogen batteries, along with relocating where the coal is NOT and the whole gamut of traditional fuels -- and all of us, not just a few of us, think outside the box, we will wallow in fire.

It will be too late to save Woody Woodpecker, or Sammy Salmon or, for that matter, Harry or Harriet Human.

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