

Alex is a six-year-old larger mixed breed dog that lives with a family of five people. He is well taken care of, spending time both inside and outside the house where he has free roam of a large backyard. Unfortunately Alex has had to spend more time outside recently because he has, over the last few months, developed an embarrassing problem. It seems he is producing an inordinate amount of gas and this flatulence has gotten bad enough that his caretakers have sent him to the yard. Alex desperately wants to return to time spent inside the house interacting with his two-legged family members and needs help solving his problem.

Flatulence is a fairly common problem we see as veterinarians in both dogs and cats. In a “normal” companion fed a consistent, proper diet without inappropriate supplementation, flatulence is not common thus implying that this condition is abnormal. I suspect that infrequent gas production is not to be worried about; however, as is the case with Alex, frequent gas production likely indicates a dietary disorder.

Gas production from the digestive tract most often comes from the large intestine, termed the colon. More accurately, it is produced by bacteria within the colon through a process called fermentation. Bacteria within the colon are a normal finding, but the fermentation process is not a normal occurrence. It most commonly occurs as a result of the presence of incompletely digested food products reaching the colon.

The colon’s primary function in dogs and cats is to resorb water from the stool thus firming up the stool and conserving water. When the colon is presented with food products, there is interference with this water resorption and the stool can become larger or loose and sometimes contain mucous. If the colon becomes extremely inflamed, fresh blood may show up along with the stool.

In Alex’s case, his excess gas production is likely due to a problem with digestion. It may be as simple as a diet that does not agree with his system. Alex’s veterinarian can determine what would be a proper diet in that case. It is very common for dogs that are inappropriately fed to, at the very least, develop flatulence especially when the inappropriate diet includes food not specifically designed for dogs. In other words, as you’ve heard from me before, do not feed human foods to your companion.

There are other more complex processes that can cause flatulence in our companions. Inflammation of the pancreas, called pancreatitis can cause digestive problems as well as a condition known as malabsorption. In fact the list of potential causes of digestive problems that can, as one symptom, cause flatulence is quite long. Hopefully, in Alex’s case, his gas problem will be an easy case to solve.

Whatever the cause, a trip to his veterinarian is the first step in bringing about a resolution to flatulence and a return to his cherished time inside the household with his family.