

Barking spiders and stepping frogs: the vocabulary of farting

Vocabulary notes

Noun

Vulgar: *fart*

Informal euphemisms: *trump, barking spiders, toot, wind*

Medical: *flatus, flatulence*

Verb phrases

Vulgar: *to fart, to let one rip, to let one go, to cut the cheese, let of a blanket ripper.*

Euphemism: *to step on a frog* (as in, "Oops, I stepped on a frog!")

Polite**: *to break wind, to pass g*

Vulgar euphemisms

to play the ass trombone

phrasal verbs (all mean *to waste time, to fool around, to goof off*)

to fart about

to fart around

to fart off

to fart-arse about

Idioms

a fart in a gale = hopeless, useless.

Example: "You've got as much chance of becoming a multi-billionaire as a fart in a gale."

a brain fart = doing something uncharacteristically stupid or inept (because your brain wasn't working); not being able to think of something that should be obvious (tip-of-the-tongue phenomenon).

Example: "My English totally sucks today; I must be having a brain fart."

More fart idioms and slang

See this huge list: http://www.sillyjokes.co.uk/fart_machine/fart_slang.html

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not usually offensive (Grandma-safe)**	possibly offensive)	nearly always offensive (use with extreme caution)
flatus, flatulence	fart	None of these expressions are as offensive to most people as the REALLY taboo words (e.g., fuck, cunt), but you should definitely use the "Grandma-safe" alternatives if you are unsure.
wind	brain fart	
to break wind	to fart about/around/off	
to pass gas	to fart-arse about	
toot	to play the arse trombone	
trump	a fart in a gale	
barking spiders	to let one rip	
to step on a frog		
to cut the cheese		

** Some people will be offended by **any** mention of bodily functions such as farting, no matter what words you use to talk about them. So beware, and stick to the Grandma-safe options if you must talk about farts.

Fart facts

Etymology

The word *fart* is thought to descend from Anglo-Saxon *feortan* or *feortian* (Wikipedia)

What are farts?

Farts contain gases such as nitrogen, carbon dioxide, methane, hydrogen, oxygen, and hydrogen sulphide. These gases are produced by bacteria that live in the digestive system and break down food into nutrients that the body can absorb.

The distinctive stink of farts comes from compounds such as skatole, indole, hydrogen sulfide, short-chain fatty acids, and volatile amines. Humans can detect these stinky compounds in concentrations of one part per 100 million!

Fart makers

What you eat has great influence on how much gas your body produces. Some items are notorious for their effects:

- Beans, lentils and other legumes; cauliflower, broccoli, cabbage and other cruciferous vegetables.
- Garlic and onions.
- Bread and beer can lead to gases as well, particularly if you switch to a different brand.
- Antibiotics that kill the bacteria in your stomach.
- Sulphur-rich foods (predominantly cauliflower, eggs and meat) make gas extra stinky.

The vegetables mentioned above contain some kinds of carbohydrates that the human digestion system cannot handle properly. In general, a high fiber diet is considered healthful. However, farts are an undesirable side-effect of diets rich in vegetables, legumes and fiber.

How much do we fart?

- It's normal to fart 12 - 40 times per day, emitting between 0.5 and two liters of gas. You should only worry if you fart significantly more than this.
- Record farting frequency: 145 farts in 24 hours, 83 farts in 4 hours.
- Animals account for 20 to 30% of the methane in the earth's atmosphere (burping and farting). Humans account for less than 5%.

Fart busters

- Reduce carbohydrates in your diet.
- Go for a walk. It stimulates digestion and "gets things moving." Just make sure to look behind you before you let rip.
- Use foods such as fennel (infusion or seeds), aniseed, peppermint, coriander or chamomile. Ginger after meals is also supposed to help.

Better out than in

It's tempting to hold in your farts to avoid embarrassment in social settings. But if you hold your farts in for too long, the gas can be absorbed in the blood stream and then exhaled as a bad breath (Wikipedia). If possible, you should find a discreet location to relieve yourself. If you can't step outside or find another room, you can try "blaming the dog" if there is a dog handy.

Fart etiquette

In the middle ages, loudly breaking wind and belching after meals were considered a sign that you had enjoyed the meal, a way of complimenting your host. This is **not** the case today in most western culture.

- In polite company, gentlemen always take the blame for ladies. Don't ask why, just do it.
- Blame the dog if there is one around.
- If there is no dog, then blame the non-existent one while laughing as if to make a joke of it. If your emission was not too pungent, this tactic can really liven up a dull party.
- Breaking wind in an elevator (lift) is sadistically evil. There is no escape for the hapless victims, and
- Steer clear of notoriously windy foods well before important social occasions.
- If someone stretches out their hand and asks you to pull their finger, they are about to fart. This is a juvenile trick much enjoyed by college students.
- If everything else fails and everybody is staring at you, try turning your mishap into an achievement: put on a proud face, execute the YES! victory gesture, and challenge your companions to beat you with an even louder/smellier one.
- Even if you loosed a "silent but deadly," don't attempt to blame anyone else in your surroundings. You can sometimes get away with feigning innocence, but you must restrain from asking questions such as "Ooh, who stepped on a frog?" Because everybody knows that *whoever smelt it, dealt it, or whoever denied it, supplied it*. The obvious response to this is of course, *the one who said the rhyme did the crime*. (Adapted from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/alabaster/A673508>)

References and further reading

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fart>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/alabaster/A673508> (Hilarious and informative!)

http://www.garlicseedfoundation.info/tail_winds.htm

<http://www.smellypoop.com/farts.html>

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