

Oxford Pelvic Floor Services

Causes of Bowel Leakage

Information for patients



There are many different possible causes of loss of bowel control, resulting in bowel leakage (faecal incontinence). Some of the most common reasons are listed below:

Reason:	This can be caused by:
Damage to the anal sphincter muscles	Childbirth Operations Injury Rectal Prolapse
Diarrhoea	Infection Inflammatory bowel disease Irritable bowel syndrome Surgery to the colon
Constipation	Immobility (not being able to move around or lack of exercise) Illness and/or long-term health conditions Diet Certain medications Some nerve diseases (e.g. Parkinson's)
Nerve injury or disease	Spinal injury Multiple sclerosis Stroke

One of the most common causes of faecal incontinence is damage to one or both of the anal sphincter muscles (**external** or **internal**).

The external anal sphincter

This is the circle of muscle which surrounds the opening to your bowel. It is responsible for delaying bowel emptying once your rectum fills and you feel the urge to empty your bowel. This muscle may become weak, or may even have a tear inside where it cannot be seen.

If you have a weak or damaged external anal sphincter muscle you are likely to experience 'urgency'. This means that you may feel that you have to empty your bowel as soon as you feel the sensation of something in your rectum. It can also mean that, if you don't reach the toilet in time, you may experience urge faecal incontinence (accidental loss of stool on the way to the toilet). This is because the weak or damaged muscle cannot squeeze hard enough to stop the stool from coming straight out.

The internal anal sphincter

This is on the inside of your anus. It is the muscle we have no control over. If you have a damaged internal anal sphincter muscle you are likely to experience passive soiling. This is when soft stool or small pellets of stool just leak out without you realising it is happening. This may be either after you have emptied your bowels (often lasting for an hour or two after each bowel action), or when you are carrying out a physical task (such as walking, bending, or more physical exertion, such as sport). You may find you have great difficulty in wiping clean after bowel emptying, and many people find that however much toilet paper is used for wiping, it still comes away with stool on it.

If you have damage to both sphincters this may lead to leakage without being aware of it as well as urgency and urge incontinence.

The pelvic floor retraining programme will support you with finding ways to manage your symptoms, helping you to feel more confident.

How to contact us

If you have any questions or need advice please contact the Advanced Nurse Practitioners, either by telephone or email.

Tel: **01865 235 881**

Email: pelvicfloor.advice@ouh.nhs.uk

Useful contacts

Bladder and Bowel Foundation

Tel: **0845 345 0165**

Website: www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org/

Email: info@bladderandbowelfoundation.org

If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473** or email **PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk**

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Colorectal Pelvic Floor Advanced Nurse Practitioners
September 2015
Review: September 2018
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