



# Do you suffer with Fecal Incontinence?

By Joseph Gauta, MD, FACOG

**A**s infants and toddlers, our bowel movement are a cause for celebration bringing great joy to parents and grandparents alike. But as we age, these natural bodily functions become a source of embarrassment and even shame for those who suffer with fecal incontinence.

According to Joseph Gauta, MD, FACOG, a board certified physician specializing in the area of Urogynecology. “Fecal incontinence is the inability to control your bowel movements, causing stool, or feces to leak unexpectedly from your rectum. This may happen occasionally while passing gas to a complete loss of bowel control.”

Common causes of fecal incontinence include constipation, diarrhea, and muscle or nerve damage. Fecal incontinence may be due to a weakened anal sphincter associated with aging or to injury to the nerve and muscles of the rectum and anus from giving birth. Also, as we age the muscles and ligaments that support your pelvis, as well as your anal sphincter muscles can weaken, leading to incontinence.

## Related Bowel Troubles may include

- Diarrhea
- Constipation
- Gas and bloating
- Abdominal cramping

## When to see a doctor

Dr. Gauta is the founder of the Florida Bladder Institute, a practice dedicated to the treatment of female incontinence (urinary, fecal and gas) and female pelvic disorders. He explains that, fecal incontinence can occur at any age but it is most common among older people, who sometimes have to cope with a lack of bladder control (urinary incontinence) as well. Other risk factors may include:

- **Being Female.** Fecal incontinence is more common in women than in men because this condition can be a complication of childbirth. Often, new mothers are reluctant to tell their doctors about their fecal incontinence problems after childbirth. But repairing a torn anal sphincter muscle soon after delivery may prevent long-term complications.



- **Nerve Damage.** People with diabetes or multiple sclerosis – conditions that can damage nerves that help control defecation – may be at risk of fecal incontinence.

- **Alzheimer’s disease.** Fecal incontinence is often a sign of late-stage Alzheimer’s disease, in which both dementia and nerve damage play a role.

- **Physical disability.** Being physically disabled may make it difficult to reach toilet in time.

Whatever the cause, fecal incontinence can be embarrassing but that is no reason to shy away from talking to your doctor about it. Many treatments – some of them simple – are available that can improve, if not correct, fecal incontinence.

## Symptoms of Fecal Incontinence

- Can’t control the passage of gas or stools, which may be liquid or solid, from your bowels.
- May not be able to make it to the toilet in time to avoid an accident.



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