

Department of
NURSING

What to do if You are Experiencing Fecal Incontinence?










What is Fecal Incontinence?

Fecal incontinence, also known as bowel incontinence, is the inability to control bowel movements causing stool (feces) to leak unexpectedly from the rectum.

Fecal incontinence may include the following:

- Flatus (gas)
- Liquid stool elements and mucus
- Solid feces

Please refer to the Bristol stool chart and observe the kind of stools you are having.

Type 1		Separate hard lumps, like nuts	May have constipation
Type 2		Sausage-shaped but lumpy	
Type 3		Like a sausage but with cracks on the surface	Ideal stool
Type 4		Like a sausage or snake, feels smooth and soft	
Type 5		Soft blobs with clear-cut edges	May have diarrhoea
Type 6		Fluffy pieces with ragged edges	
Type 7		Watery, no solid pieces	

What are the Symptoms of Fecal Incontinence?

Most incidents of fecal incontinence usually happen when you are having episodes of severe diarrhea.

Some people may have recurring or chronic fecal incontinence that can involve frequent or occasional accidental leakage.

There are two types of fecal incontinence:

- **Urge Incontinence** – When you experience a sudden and strong need to defecate and you are not able to make it to the bathroom in time
- **Passive incontinence** – When you are not aware of the need to defecate

Fecal incontinence may also be accompanied by other bowel problems, such as:

- Diarrhea
- Constipation
- Gas and bloating
- Abdominal pain or cramping
- Irritated or itchy anus

What are the Causes of Fecal Incontinence?

While it is normal to have more than one cause for fecal incontinence, it is also not unusual for fecal incontinence to happen without a clear cause.

There are many potential causes of fecal incontinence, including:

- Muscle damage
- Nerve damage – Due to diabetes, spinal cord injury, or other conditions
- Constipation – May cause impacted stool
- Diarrhea – Often due to an infection or irritable bowel syndrome
- Loss of storage capacity in the rectum
- Surgery
- Rectal prolapse – A condition that causes your rectum to drop down through your anus that stops the muscles around your anus to close completely
- Rectocele (*for females*) – A condition that causes your rectum to bulge out through your vagina

What can You do if You Have Fecal Incontinence?

1. Doing Pelvic Floor Exercises

The pelvic floor muscles are layers of muscles stretched like a hammock from the pubic bone at the front to the bottom of the backbone. The pelvic floor muscles, if weakened, cannot support the openings effectively.

Pelvic floor exercises strengthen the pelvic floor muscles, which support the bladder, bowel and, in women, the uterus and improve bowel control.

Talk to your healthcare professional before doing these exercises to make sure you are doing them properly. They may also be able to suggest additional exercises, exercise devices or muscle stimulation which could speed up the process.

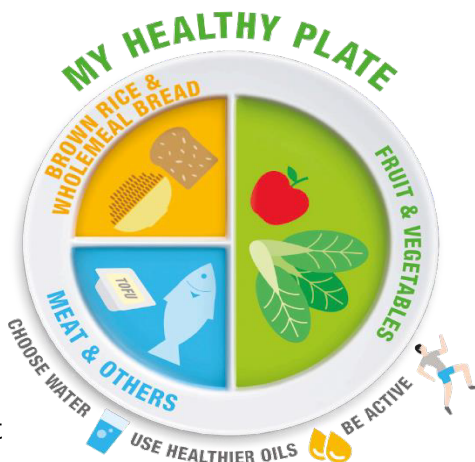
2. Making Changes to Your Diet

What you eat and drink affects the consistency of your stool. You may be able to gain better control of your bowel movements by:

- **Keeping track of what you eat.** Make a list of what you eat for a week. You may discover a connection between certain foods and your bouts of incontinence. Once you have identified foods that affects your bowels, stop eating them and see if your incontinence improves.

Food that may worsen fecal incontinence include:

- Spicy food
- Fatty and greasy food
- Cured or smoked meat
- Carbonated beverages
- Dairy products (if you are lactose intolerant)
- Food that have the same effect as laxatives such as caffeine-containing drinks and alcohol, sugar-free gum and diet soda



Please refer to Health Promotion Board – My Healthy Plate

- **Getting adequate fibre.** Fibre helps make your stool soft and easier to control. Fibre can be found in fruits, vegetables, and whole-grain breads and cereals. You should have at least 20 to 30 grams of fibre daily, but avoid adding it to your diet suddenly or all at once as this may cause bloating and gas.
- **Drinking more water.** Water helps to keep your stools soft and formed. You should drink at least 8 glasses of water daily.

3. Taking Care of Your Skin

You can help avoid discomfort from fecal incontinence by keeping the skin around your anus as clean and dry as possible. This will help relieve anal discomfort and prevent any possible odor associated with fecal incontinence:

- **Wash with water.** Gently wash the area with water after each bowel movement. Showering or soaking in a bath also may help. Soap or rubbing with dry toilet paper can dry and irritate the skin. Pre-moistened, alcohol-free, perfume-free wipes may be a good alternative for cleaning the area.
- **Dry thoroughly.** Allow the area to air-dry, if possible. If you are short on time, you can gently pat the area dry with toilet paper or a clean washcloth.
- **Apply a cream or powder.** Moisture-barrier creams help keep irritated skin from having direct contact with feces. Be sure the area is clean and dry before you apply any cream. Non-medicated talcum powder or cornstarch also may help relieve anal discomfort.
- **Wear cotton underwear and loose clothing.** Tight clothing can restrict airflow, making skin problems worse. Change soiled underwear quickly.