

# What Is Bowel Incontinence?

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Bowel incontinence is the inability to control the release of gas or stool. How severe incontinence is can range from minor difficulty (controlling gas), to complete loss of control over liquid and formed stools. Bowel incontinence is a common problem.

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## What causes Bowel incontinence?

- Trauma during childbirth that either causes a tear in the anal muscles or damage to the nerves of those anal muscles.
  - Anal operations or traumatic injury to the tissue around the anal area.
  - Decreased muscle strength from old age.
  - History of pelvic radiation.
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## How can you tell if you have Bowel incontinence?

Bowel incontinence is usually diagnosed after speaking with your doctor about your problem. Your doctor may order other tests depending on the amount of difficulty you have with bowel control.

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## How can I correct it?

If a disease that causes inflammation (redness and swelling) in the rectum (Ulcerative Colitis or Crohn's disease) is causing the bowel incontinence; treating the disease may get rid of or improve the incontinence.

If a disease is found not to be the cause of the problem; treatments may include:

- **High Fiber Diet.**
- **Antidiarrheal Medications.**
- **Muscle strengthening exercises** (pelvic floor exercises): simple home exercises that strengthen anal muscles.
- **Biofeedback:** teaches patients to sense when stool is ready to come out and help strengthen the muscles.

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## How do you correct severe cases?

Surgery may be needed if there is damage to the anal muscle from trauma that is causing the incontinence. This can be done by a surgical muscle repair, sacral nerve stimulation (SNS), or Solesta.

In extreme cases, a *colostomy* (an opening on the belly for getting rid of wastes) may be the better choice for a better quality of life.

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## How can I learn more?

You can also find information through the American Society of Colon & Rectal Surgeons (ASCRS) at <http://www.fascrs.org/patients/conditions/>

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## Do you have any questions or comments for your doctor?

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