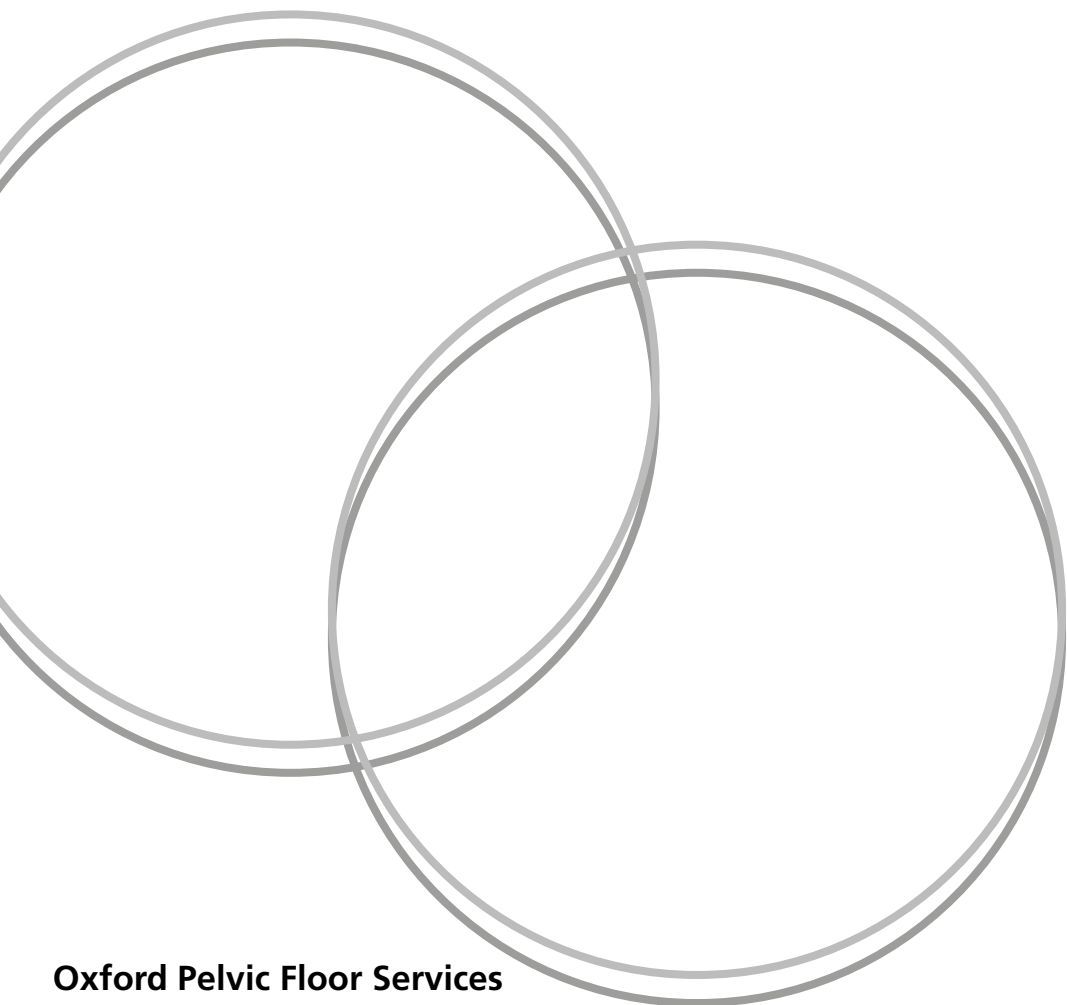




Oxford University Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Causes of Bowel Leakage

Information for patients



Oxford Pelvic Floor Services

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: Damage to the anal sphincter muscles	This can be caused by: Childbirth Operations Injury Rectal Prolapse
Reason: Diarrhoea	This can be caused by: Infection Inflammatory bowel disease Irritable bowel syndrome Surgery to the colon
Reason: Constipation	This can be caused by: 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)
Reason: Nerve injury or disease	This can be caused by: 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 us, either by telephone or email.

Tel: **01865 235 881**

Email: **pelvicfloor.advice@ouh.nhs.uk**

Useful contacts

Bladder and Bowel UK

Tel: **01616078219**

Email: **bbuk@disabledliving.co.uk**

Website: **www.bbuk.org.uk**

The Pelvic Floor Society patient information leaflets

Website: **www.thepelvicfloorsociety.co.uk**

Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

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Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
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