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## WHAT IS POOR BOWEL CONTROL?

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People with poor bowel control accidentally pass bowel motions at the wrong time or in the wrong place. They may also pass wind when they do not mean to.

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## IS POOR BOWEL CONTROL COMMON?

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About one in 20 people has poor bowel control. Both men and women can have poor bowel control. It is more common as you get older, but a lot of young people also have poor bowel control.

Many people with poor bowel control also have poor bladder control (wetting themselves).

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## WHAT CAUSES POOR BOWEL CONTROL?

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### Weak Muscles

Weak back passage muscles may be due to:

- having babies;
- getting older;
- some types of surgery – such as, for piles (haemorrhoids); or
- radiation therapy.

### Severe Diarrhoea

Diarrhoea means passing loose motions. There are many causes and it is a good idea to see your doctor to find out what can be done about this problem.

### Constipation

Constipation is a very common cause of bowel mishaps in older people or people with a disability. Motions can sometimes get clogged in the lower bowel and liquid can leak out around the clogged mass, which looks like there is a loss of bowel control.



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## WHAT SHOULD YOU DO ABOUT POOR BOWEL CONTROL?

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There are many causes of poor bowel control, so a careful check is needed to find the causes and things that might make it worse.

If you often have bowel mishaps, you should first talk to your doctor. You should also let your doctor know if you have:

- a change in your normal bowel habits;
- pain or bleeding from the back passage;
- a feeling that your bowel is never quite empty;
- dark or black bowel motions; or
- weight loss that you can't explain.

### Your doctor may:

- ask you some questions;
- do a physical exam of your pelvic floor muscles (if you say this is okay);
- ask you to keep a chart of your bowel habits and what you eat and drink for a while; or
- refer you for an ultrasound to check your pelvic floor muscles.

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## HOW CAN POOR BOWEL CONTROL BE HELPED?

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Because loss of bowel control is a warning sign and not a disease, the right care will depend on what is causing the problem.

### Care may include:

- checking the medicines and tablets you take;
- taking a new medicine to firm up your motions or to settle your bowels;
- getting constipation under control if this is a cause;
- pelvic floor muscle training to help make your pelvic floor muscles stronger. The muscles around the back passage are part of the pelvic floor muscles;
- treatment by a physiotherapist or a continence nurse who knows about pelvic floor muscle problems. This could also involve using equipment to get the pelvic floor muscles working; or
- visiting a surgeon or other specialist doctor, if your doctor refers you.



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## FOR PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA OR CONFUSION

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People with dementia or confusion may not feel, or be aware of, the urge to empty their bowels. This can lead to leaking of a normal bowel action. A common time for this to happen is soon after a meal, often breakfast.

Watching the person's bowel habits for a while may help to show a pattern of bowel habits. Also, keeping track of how they act may help to find out when a bowel motion will happen. Then the person can be taken to the toilet in time.

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## SEEK HELP

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If you do nothing it won't go away. And it might get worse.

Every bladder or bowel control problem, no matter how small, needs to be looked after. There is almost always something that can be done to help.

Call Expert Advisors on the National Continence Helpline for free:

- information;
- advice; and
- leaflets.

On FREECALL 1800 33 00 66 (8 am to 8 pm Monday to Friday), or

Visit the website: [www.bladderbowel.gov.au](http://www.bladderbowel.gov.au)

The Helpline is funded under the Commonwealth Government's National Continence Management Strategy and managed by the Continence Foundation of Australia

\* Calls from mobile telephones are charged at applicable rates.

