

Talking With Your Doctor About Fecal Incontinence / Accidental Bowel Leakage (FI/ABL)

We know that accidental bowel leakage can be a sensitive topic—and you don't have to face it alone. Our goal is to provide the tools, resources, and guidance you need to start the conversation and take control of your health. This guide is designed to help you prepare for a productive, comfortable conversation with your healthcare provider about FI/ABL.

Understanding FI/ABL

Fecal incontinence, also known as accidental bowel leakage, is a medical condition where a person is unable to control bowel movements. It is **common, treatable**, and worth discussing with a healthcare professional. Many people wait months or years to bring it up. Your doctor is trained to help and will take your concerns seriously.

Preparing for Your Appointment

To get the most out of your visit, consider gathering the information below ahead of time:

A. Symptom Details

- When did the leakage start?
- How often does it occur?
- How much stool is passed (a smear, small amount, larger amount)?
- Does it happen with urgency, activity, coughing, or without awareness?
- Are there situations that trigger it (exercise, certain foods, diarrhea, constipation)?

B. Bowel Habits

- How many bowel movements do you have per day or per week?
- Do you experience constipation or diarrhea?
- Any pain, bloating, or discomfort?

C. Medications & Medical History

- List of current medications or supplements.
- Past surgeries, childbirth history, pelvic floor issues, or neurological conditions.

D. Impact on Daily Life

- Does leakage affect your work, social activities, exercise, or emotional well-being?
 - Are you limiting foods or activities to avoid symptoms?
-

Questions You May Want to Ask Your Doctor

Asking questions can help you understand your condition and treatment options. Here are examples to guide you:

- What might be causing my symptoms?
 - Are there lifestyle changes that could help?
 - Are there pelvic floor exercises or physical therapy options?
 - What diagnostic tests would you recommend?
 - What treatments are available: medications, diet changes, rectal inserts or other continence-support devices, or procedures?
 - What should I do if symptoms worsen?
 - How soon should I expect improvement with treatment?
-

How to Start the Conversation

Many patients feel embarrassed, but your doctor discusses sensitive issues every day. You might use simple, direct language such as:

- "I've been experiencing accidental bowel leakage, and it's affecting my daily life. I'd like to talk about what might help."
 - "I sometimes can't control my bowel movements. Can we discuss what options I have?"
 - "I'm noticing bowel leakage, and I don't know what's causing it. I want to understand what I can do."
-

Treatment Options You May Hear About

Your provider may discuss one or more of the following approaches depending on your symptoms and underlying causes:

- **Dietary adjustments** (fiber, hydration, eliminating triggers like caffeine or artificial sweeteners)
- **Pelvic floor strengthening** (pelvic floor physical therapy, biofeedback)
- **Medication management** (for diarrhea or constipation)
- **Rectal inserts or continence-support devices**
- **Bowel training programs**
- **Surgical or procedural options** when appropriate

Every person's treatment plan is unique. Your provider will help guide the most appropriate next steps.

What to Bring to the Appointment

- A written list of symptoms and questions
 - Medication list
 - Past medical history summary, if available
 - A notepad or notes app to remember your doctor's recommendations
-

When to Seek Immediate Care

Although most FI/ABL cases are not emergencies, contact a healthcare provider promptly if you experience:

- New, severe, or worsening symptoms
 - Blood in the stool
 - Persistent diarrhea or dehydration
 - Sudden weakness or numbness
-

Encouragement for Patients

FI/ABL is a medical condition, not a personal failure. Many people live with these symptoms quietly, but effective help is available. Talking openly with your doctor is the first step toward improved control, comfort, and confidence.

You deserve compassionate care and clear information. Bringing this guide to your appointment can help make the conversation easier and more productive.

FI/ABL Symptom Tracker

Use this simple, user-friendly handout to help you record symptoms of fecal incontinence/accidental bowel leakage (FI/ABL). Bring this completed tracker to your doctor to support an accurate diagnosis and personalized treatment plan.

How to Use This Tracker

- Try to fill it out daily, even on days without leakage.
- More detail helps your provider identify patterns and causes.
- Bring this handout to your appointment.

Name: _____

Date Range Covered: _____

Daily Symptom Log

Use this section to track each day's symptoms. Fill out one row per day.

Date	Leakage Episode? (Yes/No)	How Many Times?	Amount (smear, small, moderate or large)	Triggers or Situations	Stool Consistency	Urgency? (Yes/No)	Notes

Bowel Movement Log

(Optional, but helpful if leakage relates to constipation or diarrhea.)

Date	Time	Stool Consistency	Amount	Urgency	Straining? (Yes/No)	Notes

Trigger Tracking

Use this area to note anything that seems to worsen or improve symptoms.

Foods or Drinks

- _____
- _____
- _____

Activities or Situations

- _____
- _____
- _____

Medication Changes

- _____
- _____
- _____

Impact on Daily Life

Rate how much FI/ABL affected you this week:

- **Physical comfort:** 0 (none) – 10 (severe) _____
- **Emotional impact:** 0 (none) – 10 (severe) _____
- **Social or activity limitations:** 0 (none) – 10 (severe) _____

Notes:

Questions for Your Doctor

Write down anything you'd like to discuss at your next appointment.

- _____
 - _____
 - _____
-

Notes:
