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DOES INCONTINENCE TO FLATUS AFFECT QUALITY OF LIFE ?

Hypothesis / aims of study

Skeptical colleagues have contested that flatal incontinence affect quality of life and suggest that it should not be perceived as a disease.

Study design, materials and methods

As part of a study on the long-term effect of delivery on the pelvic floor, we send postal questionnaire to a cohort of women 18 years after delivery.

We evaluated the association between incontinence to flatus and quality of life with a specific instrument, the fecal incontinence quality of life score, a multi-dimensional score with four sub-scales (lifestyle, coping, depression, and embarrassment) and a generic instrument, the SF-12 Physical and Mental health scales.

We excluded women with incontinence to liquid or solid stools.

The study was approved by the institutional review board, and written consent was given by each participant.

Results

472 women responded to the questionnaire and had no incontinence to solid or liquid stools. Their mean age was 47 years (range 36 to 61), 74% were married, 77% worked, 80% were multiparous. Incontinence to flatus less than once a week was reported by 20% and once a week or more by 4%.

Incontinence to flatus was strongly associated with alterations in all domains of quality of life assessed by the fecal incontinence quality of life score. Incontinence to flatus was also associated with a reduction in the mental health component of the SF-12 questionnaire, but not with the physical health component.

Table 1: Quality of life scores stratified by severity of incontinence to flatus in women with no incontinence to liquid or solid stools. Lower scores indicate lower quality of life.

Incontinence to flatus:	Never n=377	< 1x/week n=111	≥ 1x/week n=27	P
Fecal incontinence qol:				
Lifestyle	3.9	3.8	3.4	<0.0001
Coping	3.8	3.5	3.1	<0.0001
Depression	3.5	3.4	3.0	0.008
Embarrassment	4.6	3.2	2.7	<0.0001
SF-12 mental health	46.1	45.6	42.7	0.07
SF-12 physical health	47.4	46.8	46.9	0.42

Interpretation of results

Incontinence to flatus affects all domains of quality of life. It is not associated with overall poor physical health, but should be considered as a disease worth diagnosis and treatment.

Concluding message

Incontinence to flatus affects quality of life.

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