

**Question 38 – April 24**

A 55 year old multiparous postmenopausal woman presents with worsening fecal incontinence. She describes sensing stool in the rectum but having to rush to the bathroom to avoid soiling herself, and having accidents when she cannot. Which of the following is the single greatest risk factor for fecal incontinence in this patient?

- A. Female sex
- B. Post-menopausal status
- C. Number and circumstances of vaginal delivery
- D. Age

**Answer: C**

Vaginal delivery remains the most common cause of fecal incontinence in women. Increasing age and postmenopausal status may exacerbate subclinical incontinence, but the primary insult is damage to anal sphincters during vaginal delivery. Specific risk factors during delivery include prolonged, difficult labor, use of posterior midline episiotomies, and grade three and four vaginal lacerations.

**Reference:**

Corman ML, Textbook of Colon and Rectal Surgery, Fifth Edition, Lippincott Williams and Wilkins, New York, 2005.