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Wolters Kluwer

Patient education: Bedwetting in children (The Basics)

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

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Is it normal for my child to wet the bed at night?

Yes, it can be normal. Wetting the bed at night is common in young children. By age 4, most children can control their bladder when they are awake. But it can take longer for children to have control over their bladder when they are sleeping. Some children do not stop wetting the bed at night until they are 5 to 7 years old. Bedwetting is more common in boys than in girls, and can run in families.

Most children will stop bedwetting on their own and do not need any treatment. But if you are worried or have questions about your child's bedwetting, talk with your child's doctor or nurse.

Why do children wet the bed?

Bedwetting is most likely to happen when:

- A child's bladder muscles develop more slowly than usual
- A child's bladder holds a smaller than normal amount of urine
- A child's body makes a lot of urine

Most of the time, bedwetting is not caused by a medical or emotional problem. In some cases, though, it is. Your child's doctor or nurse should be able to tell if your child's bedwetting is caused by a medical problem.

What can I do to try to stop my child's bedwetting?

You can try different things at home to stop your child's bedwetting:

- Have your child urinate before going to bed. Remind them to wake up and use the toilet when needed.
- Put night lights in the hall and bathroom so your child can find the toilet easily.
- Stop using diapers or training pants at home, especially if your child is older than 8. Your child can still wear them for overnight visits with family and friends.
- Have your child help with clean up in the morning. For example, they can take the wet sheet off the bed or help with laundry.
- Keep a chart of your child's progress and give rewards when your child stays dry. You and your child should agree on the rewards ahead of time.
- Spread out your child's drinks over the whole day. Do not have your child drink a lot right before bedtime.
- Use a night-time bedwetting alarm. These have special sensors that set off an alarm when the child wets the bed. They work best in children ages 6 and older. Talk with your child's doctor or nurse about which type of alarm is best for your child and how to use it.

For any of these plans to work, both you and your child must want the bedwetting to stop. Stopping bedwetting can be very hard to do and can take a long time.

Remember that children cannot help their bedwetting. You should never get mad at, punish, or tease your child for wetting the bed.

Are there tips for how to keep my child's bed clean and dry?

Yes. Use a waterproof sheet to protect the mattress and avoid urine odor. When your child wets the bed at night, have them use the toilet before putting on dry pajamas. Then, put a dry towel on the wet part of the bed. You can also make the bed in layers, alternating sheets with waterproof pads. Then, when your child wets the bed, you can just take the wet sheet off without needing to re-make the bed.

When should I see a doctor or nurse?

You should see your child's doctor or nurse if your child:

- Feels the need to urinate more than usual

- Is more thirsty than usual
- Has a burning feeling when they urinate
- Has swelling of the feet or ankles
- Starts wetting the bed again after being dry for weeks or months

These symptoms can be a sign of a medical problem. Your child's doctor or nurse will want to check them. They will do an exam and might order tests, including a urine test.

Are there medicines that can reduce bedwetting?

Yes. There are medicines doctors can prescribe to reduce bedwetting. Medicines are usually given to children older than 6 who have already tried other ways to stop bedwetting.

More on this topic

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