

Bedwetting

What is bedwetting?

Bedwetting occurs when a child urinates (pees) during sleep without knowing it. The medical term for bedwetting is nocturnal enuresis (pronounced “en-yur-ee-sis”). Some children who wet the bed have never been dry at night; others start to wet the bed after being dry for some time.

What causes bedwetting?

No one knows the exact cause of bedwetting, although it is believed to be caused by many factors such as:

- Genetics (it can run in families)
- Difficulties waking up from sleep
- Slower than normal development of the central nervous system which reduces a child's ability to stop the bladder from emptying at night
- Inability to hold urine for a long time because of a small bladder
- Infections or conditions such as urinary tract infections, constipation, and diabetes

Bedwetting doesn't happen because the child is too lazy to get out of bed to go to the bathroom, and children do not wet the bed on purpose or to irritate their parents.

Do children outgrow bedwetting?

At 5 years of age, 15% of all children wet the bed. Even without treatment, this number goes down to 2% by the time children reach 15 years of age.

Does bedwetting need to be treated?

Not always. If bedwetting isn't upsetting for you and your child, you can simply wait for your child to outgrow it. During this time, some simple strategies might be helpful:

- Make sure your child urinates regularly during the day (on awakening, every 2 hours, before leaving home or school, and before bed).
 - Don't let your child drink too much fluid or eat caffeine-containing foods before bedtime.
 - Take your child out of diapers. Training pants may be helpful in terms of laundry. Or you can use a plastic mattress cover and a large towel under the sheet.

However, you and your doctor may decide your child needs treatment. There are several options to consider:

- reward system (sticker/star chart) for dry nights
- waking your child 2–3 hours after bedtime so that he/she can pee in the toilet
- an alarm that your child wears at night that rings when the bed gets wet, teaching your child to respond to a full bladder at night.

Your doctor may recommend medication. This should be explained to you along with the pros and cons of the medication.

How can I help my child not to feel so bad about wetting the bed?

Bedwetting can lead to behavioural problems because of the guilt and embarrassment a child feels. Punishing your child for wetting the bed will not solve the problem. Instead, try to be supportive and patient. And if, for example, you yourself wet the bed as a child, share this information with your child.

