



WHAT IS BED-WETTING?

Bed-wetting (also called nocturnal enuresis) is when the bladder empties while a child is asleep. This can happen every so often, or every night.

Bed-wetting is common. About one in every five children in Australia wets the bed. Bed-wetting can run in families and is more common in boys than girls before the age of nine years. It can be upsetting for the child and stressful for the whole family. The good news is that you can get help.

WHAT CAUSES BED-WETTING?

Wetting the bed is caused by a mix of three things:

- the body making a large amount of urine through the night;
- a bladder that can only store a small amount of urine at night; and
- not being able to fully wake up from sleep.

Children who wet the bed are not lazy or being naughty. Some illnesses are linked with bed-wetting, but most children who wet the bed do not have major health problems.

Day-time control of the bladder comes before night-time dryness. Most children are dry through the day by the age of three years and at night by school age. However, this can vary, and children may have accidents every so often, both day and night, up until they are seven or eight years of age.

WHEN SHOULD YOU SEEK HELP FOR BED-WETTING?

It is best to seek help from a health professional with special training in children's bladder problems, such as a doctor, physiotherapist or continence nurse advisor. They can help children with their bed-wetting from when the child is about six years of age. Before this time it can sometimes be hard to get the child to be helpful. However, in some cases it might be wise to seek help sooner, such as when:

- the child who has been dry suddenly starts wetting at night;
- the wetting is frequent after school age;
- the wetting bothers the child or makes them upset or angry; or
- the child wants to become dry.

CAN BLADDER CONTROL THROUGH THE DAY BE A PROBLEM?

Some children who wet the bed at night also have problems with how their bladder works through the day. They may go to the toilet too few or too many times, need to rush to the toilet in a hurry, have trouble emptying out all the urine or have bowel problems. Unless the child has wet underwear, families often do not know about these other bladder and bowel control problems. New day-time wetting by a child who is toilet trained should be discussed with a doctor.

WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT BED-WETTING?

Many children do stop wetting in their own time with no help. Most often, if wetting is still very frequent after the age of eight or nine years, the problem does not get better by itself. There are many ways to treat bed-wetting. A health professional will begin by checking the child to make sure there are no physical causes and to find out how their bladder works through the day. Then, there are a few ways to treat bed-wetting that are most often used:

- **Bladder training programs** teach the child good bladder habits. This means that the child learns to be a good drinker and to empty their bladder well when they need to go to the toilet. This cuts down sudden urges that may cause wetting. Learning to hold lots of urine through the day does not always help dry nights.
- **Night alarms** that go off when the child wets the bed. These work by teaching the child to wake up to the feeling of a full bladder. The alarm is used either on the bed or in the child's underpants. The results are best when the child wants to be dry, wets very often, has help from a parent through the night, and uses the alarm every night for several months. Some children become dry using an alarm but later start to wet again. Alarms can work again after this relapse.
- **Drugs or sprays** that change how active the bladder is or cut down how much urine is made through the night can be prescribed by a doctor. These drugs can be used to help the bladder work better at night. Drugs alone don't often cure bed-wetting. Bladder function must be improved or bed-wetting may come back when the drug is stopped.



WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

- Seek help from a health professional with special training in children's bladder problems, such as a doctor, physiotherapist or continence nurse advisor.
- Talk to your child about how their body works.
- Let your child know what has caused their problem.
- Do things with your child that help them feel good about themselves.
- Praise your child when they follow the health professional's advice.
- Ensure your child drinks five or six glasses of water daily, as many children with bladder problems do not drink enough.
- Try to cut back how many fizzy drinks your child has.
- Support your child in choosing to become dry and be positive about the treatments they are using.
- Watch for constipation as this can make the bladder problem worse. Seek medical help if it is an ongoing problem.
- If your child is using a bed-wetting alarm, get up when it goes off and help to wake them up and change their clothes or sheet. Make sure there is enough light at night so it is easy to get to the toilet.

There are some things which do NOT help:

- DO NOT punish for wet beds.
- DO NOT shame the child in front of friends or family.
- DO NOT lift the child at night to toilet them. This may cut down on some wet beds, but it does not help the child learn to be dry.
- DO NOT try to fix bed-wetting when other family members are going through a stressful time.

SEEK HELP

Every bladder or bowel control problem—no matter how small—deserves attention. Childhood bed-wetting is common and help is available.

Call Expert Advisors on the National Continence Helpline for free:

- information;
- advice; and
- leaflets.

On FREECALL 1800 33 00 66 (8 am to 8 pm Monday to Friday), or

Visit the website: www.bladderbowel.gov.au

The Helpline can arrange for an interpreter through the Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS). Please ring 13 14 50 Monday to Friday and ask for the Helpline.

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* Calls from mobile telephones are charged at applicable rates.

