

# Enuresis

We use the word *enuresis* to describe when children over the age of 3 wet themselves during the day, or when children over 5 wet the bed at night.

There are many causes but the most important one is the hereditary factor. If one of the parents had enuresis when they were young, the child will take longer to grow out of the habit and will do so later than other children.

Children's bladders are small: it only takes a small amount of urine to fill them. Besides, they can't retain much liquid, because the muscles that keep the sphincter closed haven't strengthened yet.

At the time of deepest sleep, late at night, children are more likely to wet the bed. Bed-wetting that occurs in the early hours of the morning will probably be caused by a full bladder.

## When should we stop using a nappy at night?

From the age of 2 onwards you can try stopping using a nappy in summer. If the child can't last out the whole night, not to worry: you can try again next summer, up to the age of 5. Once a child reaches this age and still needs a nappy, then it's a case of what is known as *primary nocturnal enuresis*.

## What can you do if your son or daughter wets the bed?

With our best intentions, here are some suggestions for dealing with bed-wetting at home.

The first thing to do is to take pressure off both parents and children. The problem should be played down and the child should never be blamed or reproached. There's no rule dictating that all children should retain their urine at the same age, they all take different lengths of time to grow up.

To reduce urine production during the night the child can be given a low-salt diet and, in the evening, large amounts of liquid (soups, milk, an excess of glasses of water etc.) should be avoided. Of course, this doesn't mean that the child should ever go thirsty.

As children tend to go to bed earlier than their parents, some parents wake them up to urinate when they themselves go to bed, but you need to consider each separate case: if this disturbs the child, it's better not to do so.

To develop the bladder muscle that retains urine, you can try playing the game of stopping the flow of urine and holding it in for a few moments.

This is a way of learning to control the imperious urge to urinate.

With the help of their parents, some children keep a urination calendar. They note the days that they manage not to wet the bed (they draw a sun on the calendar or put a sticker on it). You can start with a reasonable goal, like starting with just one sun, and then 2 or 3 suns in a row and going on to 5 suns in a row and so on. There's a reward when they achieve the goal (preferably a family activity that they like).

From the age of 6 onwards, it's advisable for children to take control: they can be given a towel so that if they wake up wet, they can go to the bathroom, finish urinating, cover the wet part of the bed with the towel and go back to sleep. Depending on each individual case, children can do this alone or with a parent's help. Then, when they get up, it's up to them to put the sheets in the washing machine and help make their bed. Using nappy alarms usually causes them too much distress.

Once children reach the age of 6 or 7, the paediatrician may recommend giving them some sort of medication to help them control themselves. These treatments usually last several months, normally based on the child's age, and the dose is adjusted as their control improves.



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