

Bed-Wetting

When do most children achieve bladder control?

Children achieve bladder control at different ages. By the age of 5 years, most children no longer urinate in their sleep. Bed-wetting up to the age of 5 is not unusual, even though it may be frustrating to parents. Treating a child for bed-wetting before the age of 5 is not necessary and may even be harmful to the child.

What causes bed-wetting?

The exact cause of most bed-wetting is not known. Many factors are involved. In some children, the cause may be genetic (bed-wetting tends to run in families). In other children, nighttime bed wetting may occur because more urine is produced during sleep. Another cause of bed-wetting may be a small bladder and its inability to hold urine for a long time.

A less common cause of bed-wetting may be a problem with the bladder, the kidneys or the nervous system. Deep sleep is not thought to be a cause of bed-wetting. Emotional stress usually is not a cause, but it may be for a child who has had full bladder control for a long time and then starts wetting the bed again. Most of the time, bed-wetting is not a sign of illness, stress or a mental problem. Your doctor can help you decide if your child needs special testing.

Will my child outgrow bed-wetting?

If your child has no other medical or emotional problems, there is a very good chance that he or she will outgrow the problem, even without treatment. If your child is older than 6 or 7, your doctor will probably suggest treatment, because bed-wetting may cause your child to think poorly of himself or herself and to be embarrassed about sleeping away from home.

What is the best treatment for bed-wetting?

Your child should be seen by your family doctor to see if special testing is needed. If your child is healthy and no reason for the bed-wetting is found (this will be the case about 90% of the time), your doctor may suggest a few different treatments. Some of these treatments are listed below:

- A special pad attached to your child's underwear at bedtime senses when the child urinates and causes an alarm to sound or a buzzer to go off.
- Medicine in the form of pills, liquids or a nasal spray.
- A reward system for dry nights.
- Asking your child to change the bed sheets when he or she wets.
- Having your child practice holding his or her urine for longer and longer times.

Should I punish my child for wetting the bed?

No. Punishing your child for wetting the bed will not solve the problem. Your child doesn't wet the bed on purpose. He or she needs your love and support. You may feel frustrated at times, but your child may be too. Asking your doctor for help will be better for both you and your child.

This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.

Visit familydoctor.org for more useful information on this and many other health-related topics.

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