

Your Child Is Normal Bedwetting: A Guide for Parents

Bedwetting (also called nocturnal enuresis) is a very common concern of parents. The good news is that most children eventually outgrow it, and in the vast majority of cases, bedwetting is not a sign of a medical problem or a lack of effort.

Bedwetting is common.

- About 15% of 5-year-olds wet the bed.
- Many children continue to have occasional accidents throughout elementary school.
- Most children outgrow bedwetting naturally with time.

One of my favorite reminders for families is this:

Children do not wet the bed because they are lazy. They wet the bed because they are sleeping.

Step 1: Check the Bowels

One of the most overlooked causes of bedwetting is constipation.

The bladder and bowel sit right next to each other. When stool builds up in the rectum, it can put pressure on the bladder and contribute to:

- Bedwetting
- Daytime accidents
- Urinary urgency
- Frequent urination

Ask yourself:

- Is my child having regular bowel movements?
- Are stools soft and easy to pass?

If constipation is present, treating it can significantly improve bladder symptoms.

Step 2: Encourage Healthy Bladder Habits

Many children get so busy playing or participating in life activities that they ignore the urge to urinate.

Encourage your child to:

- ✓ Urinate first thing in the morning
- ✓ Use the bathroom every 2–3 hours during the day
- ✓ Avoid “holding it”
- ✓ Empty their bladder before bedtime

*A helpful goal is about 5–6 bathroom trips per day.

Step 3: Drink Early. Not Late

Children should drink plenty of fluids during the day.

Rather than focusing on restriction, try shifting most fluid intake earlier in the day and avoiding large drinks right before bedtime.

Step 4: Avoid Shame and Punishment

Bedwetting is rarely under a child's control. Punishment, teasing, frustration, and embarrassment do not help children become dry sooner. A supported child is more likely to become a confident and dry child.

Instead:

- Praise effort
- Celebrate small successes
- Stay matter-of-fact about accidents

Step 5: Consider a Bedwetting Alarm

For children who are motivated to become dry, a bedwetting alarm can be very effective. The alarm senses moisture and helps train the brain to respond to a full bladder during sleep. While it requires consistency and patience, it is one of the most successful long-term treatments we have.

Step 6: Medication for Special Occasions

For sleepovers, camp, overnight trips, or other special events, some children benefit from desmopressin. This medication reduces nighttime urine production and can help keep children dry for important occasions.

When Should I Call the Office?

Please let us know if your child has:

- Pain or burning with urination
- Frequent urinary tract infections
- Excessive thirst
- New bedwetting after being dry for months or years
- Significant constipation that is difficult to manage

These symptoms may suggest that additional evaluation is needed.

The Bottom Line

Bedwetting is common.

Bedwetting is treatable.

Most importantly, bedwetting is not your child's fault.

The best approach is usually:

1. Treat constipation if present
2. Encourage healthy bladder habits
3. Stay patient and supportive
4. Consider a bedwetting alarm if needed

In most cases, time is on your child's side, and dry nights will come.