Nighttime Wetting (Enuresis)

What is enuresis?
“Enuresis” (ehn-yoor-EE-sis) means wetting the bed at night after an age when most children are dry. No one really knows what causes it.

At what age should I expect my child to be dry?
All children develop at their own pace. Just like some children learn to walk or talk later, some children may get control of their bladders later. Most children develop control of their bladders during the day when they are between 2 and 5 years old. Once your child can control their bladder during the day, they can usually control it at night within 6 months.

About 20 percent of 5- to 6-year-olds in the United States still wet the bed at night. Usually, most children do not wet anymore once they get older, but it can take some time. About 3% of 18-year-olds wet the bed. Over time, almost all kids stop wetting the bed.

It can be helpful to keep track of the dry nights on a calendar so that you and your child can keep track of their progress.

When should I get help for my child for nighttime wetting?
After the age of 7 or 8, most children with nighttime wetting are old enough to take part in a night training program. This is a program that helps children learn how to control their bladders at night. Your child must want to be dry and be willing to work with you for any program to work.

What treatments are there for nighttime wetting?

Watch and wait
Usually, children stop wetting at night as they grow older. There is no way to know when your child will be dry every night. If you and your child keep track of dry nights, you will probably start to see their progress. Usually, this gets better slowly, over a few months.

Medicines
There are two kinds of medicines that help with nighttime wetting. Medicines do not work for all children. Even if medicine works for your child, when they stop taking medicine, there is a good chance that they will start wetting again.

• Imipramine Hydrochloride/Tofranil. This is usually used to treat depression. It also seems to help with nighttime wetting, even though we are not sure why. It comes as a pill that your child takes every day.
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It usually helps about 40% to 50% of children. There can be side effects to taking this medicine. If your child takes it, they will need blood tests every 6 months. It is not very expensive.

• Desmopressin Acetate /DDAVP. This medicine helps you to make less urine. It comes as a nasal spray and can be used every day, or just once in a while. For example, if your child is going to a sleepover or to camp, they may want to take medicine to help them to not wet the bed at night. This medicine is very expensive.

Night Alarm

Night alarms help to wake your child up in the night if they start to wet. There are many different kinds of night alarms that your child can use. Most alarms have a sensor that makes them buzz or vibrate when your child wets. This wakes your child up so they can get up and go to the bathroom.

If your child uses an alarm, they will use it every night until they are dry each night for three weeks. It might take months for this to happen, but alarms are the best treatment for nighttime wetting. About 80% of children stay dry every night after they finish using the alarm. It is not very expensive, and you only need to get one alarm.

If you have any questions about nighttime wetting or these treatments, please call the Urology clinic at the number in the “To Learn More” box on the left.