

Troubled nights

Help for people who
wet the bed



*In*contact
www.incontact.org



A common problem

Many people wet the bed at night, although few talk about it. Most people think that no one else has this problem. Many of us never seek help because of embarrassment.

Bedwetting is sometimes called "*nocturnal enuresis*". Some of us wet the bed regularly all our lives. Others grow out of bedwetting during childhood but start again later in life.

With the right advice and support, something can be done to help most people. Bedwetting can often be cured. Even if you tried everything when you were younger, it is always worth trying again. New ways of managing and treating bedwetting may help.

Bedwetting causes many practical problems. Dealing with wet sheets and bedding can be difficult. We may end up spending a lot of money on laundry or on disposable pads and pants. We may worry about staying away overnight, going on holiday or on business trips. Young people often worry about moving away from home to go to college. Bedwetting affects our sleep patterns and can leave us feeling tired and frustrated.

These problems can also effect the way we think about ourselves. It may be a secret which we keep hidden from family and friends. This can be a great strain. Some of us do not want to get involved in a relationship in case our new partner finds out.

But for those who suffer from bedwetting there is a lot that can be done to help - and no one should feel ashamed about having such a common problem. This booklet talks about what can be done to help - and points the way to places and people who may be useful.

Just talking about the problem is a good start. Many of us find that discussing it can even make a friendship or relationship stronger.

What causes bedwetting?

The causes are often unclear.

Usually, people produce less urine when they are sleeping. Some people produce larger amounts of urine during the night - this may explain why the bladder needs emptying at night. But why don't some people wake up when they need to go to the toilet? No one really knows the answer to this question.

Some people have an "overactive" or "unstable" bladder which causes problems during the daytime as well as at night. We get sudden urges to go to the toilet. Sometimes we do not get there in time - this is called urge incontinence. For more information about the overactive bladder ask for a free copy of *Incontact's* booklet *Just Can't Wait*.

The type and amount of fluids we drink is also important. We need fluids to stay healthy, but some types of drink can irritate the bladder or make the body produce urine quicker than normal. Alcoholic drinks and drinks that contain caffeine - like tea, coffee, hot chocolate and cola - can affect some people in these ways.

An infection in the urine can sometimes cause bedwetting. Stress or anxiety can also cause the problem, which might last long after the stress has gone.



At first I tried to ignore the bedwetting - I did not understand why it should happen to me. I felt despair, embarrassment and loneliness.



Help is available

There are many things that can be done to help. The first thing to do is talk to a doctor or specialist nurse. Some of us worry about this because we're embarrassed. You could write a short note for the doctor or nurse to read before the appointment. Your note can explain the problem and will help to start the conversation at your appointment.

The doctor or nurse will want to know about your bladder habits. It may be useful for you to keep a "diary" for a week or so before your appointment. You can note down how often you go to the toilet, how much you drink, how many times you get up at night, and when you wet the bed.

The doctor may test a sample of urine for infection. The doctor might also arrange for you to go to a hospital for specialist bladder tests - called urodynamics. For more information, *Incontact* has a leaflet about urodynamics.

What kind of help is available?

Medicine

Your doctor may prescribe a medicine. Some medicines work by reducing the amount of urine produced while we sleep - so we don't need to get up as often to empty the bladder. Other medicines work by relaxing the bladder so that it holds more urine. It is important that the doctor knows whether you have any bladder problems during the daytime as this may affect which medicine he or she offers you.

Alarms

Enuresis alarms are designed to wake you up as soon as you start to wet the bed. A sensor is placed inside pants or under the bed sheet. When the sensor detects wetness it sets off an alarm to wake you. This can be a buzzer or a vibrating pad. A vibrating pad doesn't make any noise so will not disturb anyone else.

Alarms help some people to wake before they wet the bed. Modern alarms are small and discreet and can be worn close to the body. Alarms are most successful if they are used under the supervision of a professional - a specialist continence nurse, for example.

Helping yourself

Drinking

The type and amount of fluids we drink has a big effect on our bladders. Some drinks can irritate the bladder or make the body produce more urine than normal. Alcohol and caffeine can have these effects - try drinking less tea, coffee and alcoholic drinks and see if this helps.

We need to drink around 3 pints of fluid per day to stay healthy. People who get up at night or wet the bed may want to drink less in the evenings and before going to bed. But do not stop drinking fluids altogether - this can make bladder problems worse.

Waking Yourself

Make sure you empty your bladder before you go to sleep. Some people find that they can avoid a wet bed by setting an alarm to wake them a few hours after they go to sleep.

Retraining your bladder

Many people need to go to the toilet very often during the day. We feel the urge to go to the loo - even if our bladder is not full. Bladder re-training can sometimes help with this problem. See Incontact's booklet *Just Can't Wait* for more information about this.

Managing bedwetting

It is important that we find the most suitable way of managing bedwetting. How can we cope with the wetness and protect our bedding?. There are lots of products to help manage this problem and let us get on with our lives.

Bed protection

There are many products available to protect mattresses as well as absorbent bed pads to absorb urine. These can keep us comfortable, keep bed and mattress dry, and protect against stains and smells. Waterproof covers are also available for duvets, pillows and even sleeping bags.

The simplest and cheapest form of bed protection is a PVC sheet which is put between the mattress and the bottom sheet. Fitted sheets are available and are less likely to slip than plain sheets. PVC sheets can make you hot in bed...and they get hard and noisy after a few washes.

Better quality mattress protectors are made of breathable water repellent fabrics. These stop urine from reaching the mattress but feel more comfortable than PVC sheets.

These sheets protect the mattress but do not absorb any urine. Some people wear absorbent pads in bed. Some prefer to use a bed pad on top of the mattress. Many people use both a body worn and a bed pad - it's up to you to choose what suits you. Talk to a continence advisor to discuss what is available. You can also get product information sheets from *Incontact*.

The most simple bed pads are put under the sheet. The pad will soak up urine but the bed sheet will be wet too. Better bed pads are designed to sit on top of the bed sheet. They have "stay-dry" surfaces so that the pad feels dry even when it is wet. Good bed pads also have wide wings to tuck in on either side of the bed - these stop the bed pad from slipping.

Staying away from home can often cause difficulties. If you are staying in a hotel, ask before you arrive if they can provide a waterproof sheet. You could also check about laundry facilities and disposal of used pads. RADAR produces holiday guides which give information about hotels in the UK that cater for people with bedwetting and other continence problems. Their contact details are at the end of this booklet.

Pads and pants

There are all sorts of pads and pants to help protect our bedding and ensure a good night's sleep. Disposable pads are popular with many people. Others prefer pads that are washable. It is a matter of personal preference - talk to a continence advisor and have a look at *Incontact's* product information sheets for more details.

Who can I contact for more information?

Your local continence advisor or specialist nurse can help. Call your local doctor, health centre or *Incontact* to find out more.

Incontact provides support and information to people with bladder and bowel problems. We produce a quarterly magazine and a range of booklets and information sheets. We have groups and helplines around the country. Please let us know how we can help.

All our publications and services are free for people affected by bladder or bowel problems, and their carers. *Incontact* gratefully receives donations - these help us do more to help the millions of people living with these conditions. Cheques can be made out to 'Incontact' - or you can get in touch with us to find out more about making a Gift Aid donation or leaving a legacy to help our work.

Incontact

United House, North Road

London N7 9DP

Tel: 0870 770 3246

e-mail: info@incontact.org web: www.incontact.org

ERIC (Enuresis Resource and Information Centre) provides help and advice for children and young people who wet the bed.

34 Old School House, Britannia Road

Kingswood, Bristol BS15 8DB

Tel: 0117 960 3060 (weekdays 10.00 am to 4.00 pm)

e-mail: info@eric.org.uk web: www.eric.org.uk

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12 City Forum, 250 City Road

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