

Using an alarm to treat bedwetting



A guide for teenagers and young adults

What is a bedwetting alarm?

A bedwetting alarm is a sound box attached to a sensor. When the sensor detects moisture (wee) the sound box will make a noise. The idea is that the noise is loud and intrusive enough to wake you up. Some alarms are also able to vibrate, some have a light that flashes, and some allow you to record your own sound. These are all to help wake you.

There are lots of different bedwetting alarms available. Your parent/carer may choose to buy one or the clinic that is supporting you may be able to lend you one.

How does the bedwetting alarm work?

It is thought that the alarm will teach your brain that your bladder signals are important and help you learn to wake up when your bladder needs to empty. However, many teenagers who become dry with the alarm, find that they learn to sleep through the night without needing to wake to go to the toilet.

How does the bedwetting alarm work?

You should do as much with the alarm as you are able too. If you need support to use the alarm, ask your parent/carer to help you.

- Before you go to bed, check that the alarm is set up correctly, according to the manufacturer's instructions and that it is working.
- You may find it helpful to have some clean nightwear and bedding ready, in case it is needed during the night.

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- When you start to wet, the alarm should make a noise and wake you up. Ask your parent/carer to wake you if they hear the alarm and you have not managed to wake up. Turn off the alarm when you are awake. If you need help to turn off the alarm, please ask your parent/carer. The alarm should only be turned off once you are fully awake and out of bed. Doing this will help your brain to learn to wake up to the alarm.
- Go to the toilet and try to wee, even if you feel your bladder is already empty.
- Get washed and change into dry nightwear and change your bed if it is wet. If you cannot manage to do this yourself, your parent/carer can help you.
- Go back to bed. You do not need to reset the alarm even if the bed is wet again before morning, unless your healthcare professional tells you that you should.
- In the morning, make a note of what time the alarm sounded, how big the wet patch was (small, medium, or large) and wash the alarm sensor (the bit that got wet), following the manufacturer's instructions. Do not get the alarm box wet.

How will I know if the alarm is working?

It often takes several weeks before there is an increase in dry nights. However, there should be early signs that the alarm is going to work in the first four weeks.

These signs include:

- Learning to wake to the alarm.
- Being able to pass some urine in the toilet after waking.
- Smaller wet patches.
- The alarm sounding later in the night (you can sleep for longer before the wetting happens)

Any one of these is a sign that the alarm is likely to work well for you, if you continue to use it.

If none of these happen in the first four weeks, then the alarm may not be the right treatment at this time. You and your parent/carer should discuss this and the different treatment options with your healthcare professional.

If you see some of the early signs of progress, as listed above, you should be dry within 12 -16 weeks. If you are not dry in this time, ask your healthcare professional for help and advice. You may need other treatment, such as desmopressin, as well as or instead of the alarm.

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How will I know if the alarm is working?

You should continue to use the alarm until you have had at least 28 consecutive dry nights.

What should I do if the bedwetting starts again?

Most people who become dry with an alarm will stay dry. However, if the bedwetting comes back, you can use the alarm again.

It is sometimes suggested that, to increase the chances of you staying dry, you have a few sips of water, or a water-based drink at bedtime. You could start to do this when you have had 14 consecutive dry nights. If you stay dry with a few sips, then the amount you drink before bed should slowly be increased. When you are managing to have a small glass of water before bed and staying dry you can stop drinking before bed, unless you are thirsty and can stop using the alarm.

If you start to wet with the increase in water, reduce the amount that you are having down to the level at which you were last dry. Stay at that level for a few nights, before trying to increase again. When you can manage a small glass of water before bed and stay dry, you can stop using the alarm and stop drinking before bed, unless you are thirsty.

By practising having a drink before bed, while still using the alarm, you can increase your chances of staying dry permanently.

Please note: If you are taking desmopressin (medicine for bedwetting) you must not drink for the hour before you take it and for eight hours afterwards. Ask your healthcare professional for advice about how to stop using the alarm when you are dry.

What should I do if the bedwetting starts again?

Alarms can be an effective treatment, with many teenagers who become dry, staying dry. If you start to experience wet nights again, a further time using the alarm is often all that is needed for you to stay dry.

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The alarm can mean you may not need to take any medication, which some teenagers prefer. You are also able to drink until bedtime (**unless you are also taking desmopressin – Some teenagers may be prescribed desmopressin to use at the same time as they use an alarm**). You may be advised to avoid drinks in the hour before bed, at least to start with. This is because drinking before bed may increase the likelihood of a wet night.

What should I do if the bedwetting starts again?

The alarm may not be suitable for everyone.

A bedwetting alarm is designed to make a loud, intrusive noise so that you will wake when you start to pass urine. This can happen at any time in the night. Most teenagers may still need their parent or carer to help them to learn to wake up, to go to the toilet and to change the bed, which can be hard work and difficult if your parent or carer is not able to help you for any reason.

The alarms usually take about 12 -16 weeks to be fully effective. If you are not able to use the alarm for this length of time, then it might not be the best option for you.

If you have difficulty settling to sleep or getting back to sleep after you have been woken up at night, then an alarm may not be right for you.

You may find it difficult to accept being woken by the alarm and having to go to the toilet and get changed in the night when you would rather be sleeping. For this reason, alarms may not be suitable. However, many teenagers do well with alarms. Teenagers with learning disabilities can also use an alarm successfully although some will need support.

What are the options if the alarm is not working?

If the alarm does not appear to be working, ask your healthcare professional for advice. Sometimes a combination of using the alarm and taking medication, such as desmopressin may be needed and sometimes medication alone works well. If the alarm is not successful the first time it is used, it may be worth trying again at another time. This is because your body is still growing and changing so may respond differently to the alarm at another time.

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Where can I get more information and advice?

Your healthcare professional should be able to offer you an assessment to establish the cause of your wetting and then discuss options for treatment with you. Remember, some teenagers need other treatments as well as, or instead of the alarm. Always follow the advice of your healthcare professional and talk to them if you have questions or concerns.

Further information

Find more information about child bladder and bowel health in our information library at www.bbuk.org.uk. You can also contact the [Bladder & Bowel UK confidential helpline](tel:01612144591) (0161 214 4591).

For further advice on bladder and bowel problems speak to your GP or other healthcare professional.

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