

Using a wetting alarm to support a toilet training programme



What does a wetting alarm do?

A wetting alarm is a small device that can be used to help a child and their carer know when the child is doing a wee (passing urine). If used during the day alongside a structured toilet training programme, a wetting alarm can help children learn to recognise their bladder signals, before they start to wee.



Where can I get a wetting alarm?

Your healthcare professional may be able to arrange for you to borrow a wetting alarm.

If you are not able to borrow an alarm, you can purchase them. They are often sold as body-worn bedwetting or enuresis alarms. There are a variety of different makes at different prices. The important thing is to choose one with a loud and invasive noise, that you will notice. If you are concerned that your child may be upset by the noise, ask your healthcare professional for advice.

How does a wetting alarm work?

The wetting alarm has a small moisture sensor, which is either clipped to the outside of the child's pants, or placed between two pairs of pants (depending on the type of sensor used). The sensor is attached to a sound box. When the child starts to wee the sensor detects the wetness and sends a message to the sound box, which makes a noise.

Using a wetting alarm to support a toilet training programme

When would you use the alarm?

The alarm may be useful for children who have been on a toilet training programme, but are not noticing when they are weeing or when they are wet. It should be used during the day, for as many consecutive days as required and for as much of the time that the child is awake as possible.

The child should be closely supervised while using the alarm. This is because its success depends on a carer consistently taking the child to the toilet as soon as the alarm sounds.

It is a good idea to start using the alarm when the child and carer can have a few consecutive days at home, such as during school holidays. The child should then be comfortable and happy to use it when they are at their nursery, school or other care setting.

The practicalities of using an alarm both at home and outside the home setting should always be considered. It may not be appropriate to use the alarm in mainstream schools or public places.

How to use the alarm

It is important that the child understands, as far as possible, what the alarm is for and what will happen when the alarm sounds. This can be explained to the child using social stories and picture cues, as well as through role play, using a doll or teddy.

Every child is different so it is important that an individualised programme is developed for each child. The support of a health care professional is important for this.

It is usually suggested to:

- Put the alarm on as soon as your child wakes in the morning. Put your child in ordinary washable pants (toilet training pants have extra absorbency in them that may prevent the sensor from detecting the wetting). Your child needs to stay in pants throughout the day. Daytime use of nappies or disposable pants during toilet training may be confusing for the child, as it is important that they feel wet every time they have an accident. This reinforces the need to use the potty or toilet.

Using a wetting alarm to support a toilet training programme

- Attach the sensor to the outside of your child's pants, or place it between two pairs of pants, depending on the type of sensor used. Attach the sound box to your child's clothes, between their shoulder blades is usually the best place. Thread the wire under their clothes.
- As soon as the alarm goes off, say your child's name and something like "wee wee" or "toilet now".
- Take your child straight to the potty or toilet. Turn the alarm off and remove the sensor from their pants. If your child is upset by the noise, you can turn the alarm off before taking them to the potty or toilet.
- Help your child pull their pants down and sit them on the potty/toilet even if you think they have already finished weeing.
- Praise your child for sitting on the potty/toilet and give them extra praise and a small reward (if used) if they manage to do a wee. Your child should be encouraged to sit on the toilet or potty for about one minute for each year of their age with you encouraging them to do a wee. (see Bladder & Bowel UK leaflets on toilet training for ideas on how to introduce sitting on the toilet or potty)
- To start with your child may have done a complete wee by the time you get them to the potty or toilet, so they are not able to do any more. Still praise them for sitting and in a very neutral voice, or using a picture cue, remind them that wees need to go into the potty or toilet.
- Wipe and dry the sensor, clean your child and help them put on clean clothes. Reconnect the sensor to the sound box.
- Take your child back to what they were doing before the alarm sounded.
- Repeat the process every time the alarm sounds.
- Encourage your child to drink well – the more often the alarm sounds the more practice they are getting.

Using a wetting alarm to support a toilet training programme

How will I know if my child is making any progress?

Signs that the wetting alarm is working include:

- Your child is able to stop themselves weeing, as soon as they hear the alarm. When this happens still take them straight to the potty or toilet and encourage them to do a wee – they will not be able to hold on for long, this will come later.
- Your child manages to do more wee in the potty/toilet.
- Your child starts to take themselves to the potty or toilet, or to say, sign or otherwise indicate that they need to do a wee.

Most children will start to show signs of progress within three to four weeks. Therefore, you should continue with the alarm for at least four weeks. Ask your healthcare professional for support if you feel that your child has made no progress in this time.

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.
