

Understanding alarms as treatment for bedwetting

Information for parents and carers

What is an enuresis alarm?

An enuresis alarm has a sound box, and a sensor. When the sensor gets wet the sound box will make a noise. The noise should wake your child. Some children and teenagers need their parents to wake them until they learn to wake up to the noise. Some alarms also vibrate, some have a light that flashes, and some allow you to make your own recording. These can help wake your child or teenager.

How does the enuresis alarm work?

The alarm helps your child or teenager wake up when the bladder needs to empty. Many children and teenagers who become dry with the alarm manage to sleep through the night: they do not need to wake up to use the toilet. We do not yet know why this happens.

How should an enuresis alarm be used?

Your child or teenager should do as much with the alarm as they can manage. Young children and children with disabilities may need more support than older children. They can still become dry with an alarm.

- Set up the alarm according to the manufacturer's instructions before your child or teenager goes to bed. Check that it is working.
- Have some clean nightwear and bedding ready.
- When the alarm makes a noise check that your child or teenager has woken up. Wake them if they are still asleep.
- Ask your child or teenager to turn off the alarm. If they cannot turn off the alarm themselves, only turn it off when they are awake and out of bed.
- Encourage them to go to the toilet and try to pass urine. They should do this, even if they feel that their bladder is already empty.
- Your child or teenager should get washed and put on dry night clothes. Change the bed if it is wet.
- Make a note of what time the alarm sounded and how big the wet patch was (small, medium or large)
- Go back to bed. The alarm does not need to be reset, even if the bed is wet again before morning.
- Wash the sensor. Follow the manufacturer's instructions. Do not get the alarm box wet.

How will we know if the alarm is working?

It may take up to four weeks for the alarm to start to work. It may be several weeks before there are more dry nights. If the alarm is going to work most children and teenagers will be dry within 12-16 weeks.

Early signs that the alarm is working are your child or teenager:

- waking when the alarm goes off.
- being able to pass urine in the toilet after waking.
- having smaller wet patches.
- sleeping for longer before the alarm makes a noise.

If you see any of these signs in the first 3 -4 weeks of using the alarm it is likely to be successful.

When can we stop using the alarm?

If the alarm is working, continue to use it until your child or teenager has had 28 consecutive dry nights.

If there are no signs of improvement (see above) within 4 weeks, the alarm may not be the right treatment. It may be tried again after a break of 6 -12 months. Talk about the different treatment options with your child or teenager's healthcare professional.

Where can we get an alarm?

If your child or teenager attends a clinic they may lend them an alarm. You may choose to buy an alarm.

What are the advantages of an alarm?

Many children and teenagers who become dry with an alarm stay dry. If wetting starts again, try using the alarm again. This often leads to permanent dry nights.

If they use an alarm your child or teenager may not need any medication. Many families prefer this.

Your child or teenager will be able to drink until bedtime. They must stop drinks an hour before bed with one medicine. However, they may be told to avoid drinks in the hour before bed, at least to start with.

Is an alarm suitable for everyone?

Alarms make a loud noise to wake your child or teenager when the wetting starts. This can happen at any time of the night.

Most children need a parent or carer to help them wake them for the first few nights. Some children need help with washing and changing. That can be hard work for you and your child or teenager. The alarm can take 12 -16 weeks to work. They do not work for everyone.

If your child or teenager struggles to get back to sleep after waking, it might not be the right option.

The alarms work best for children and teenagers who want to be dry. They may not work as well for those who are not upset by the wetting.

Children with learning disabilities can be successful with alarms. They may need more support.

What are the options if the alarm is not working?

If the alarm is not working, ask your child or teenager's healthcare professional for advice. Many children do well with alarms, but they are not the answer for everyone.

Some children and teenagers need to use the alarm and take medication. Some do well with medication alone.

If the alarm is not successful the first time your child or teenager uses it, it may help when they are a bit older.

Further information

Find more information about child bladder and bowel health in our [information library](#). You can also contact the Bladder & Bowel UK [confidential helpline](#) (0161 214 4591).

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

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