

BEDWETTING BRIEF

Useful Techniques for Treating Enuresis

Volume 1, No. 2



The type of bedwetting alarm a family chooses can make a huge difference in the results.

The degree of success a family can expect when treating bedwetting can be determined by the type of alarm they choose. A vibratory-only alarm or one that is uncomfortable can easily sabotage the family's best efforts.

Parents' role in the treatment process.

For best results in treating bedwetting, parents should look for an audible, easy-to-use alarm. Parents need to understand that most children do not hear the alarm, jump out of bed and run to the bathroom the first night. This is a process that is gradually learned and the parents' response to the alarm is necessary in the beginning.

There are a variety of bedwetting alarms on the market today, ranging in price and features, but sorting through the choices can be mind boggling. So, what key features should your patients look for when selecting a bedwetting alarm?

1. An alarm should be usable.

Will your child wear an alarm in the first place? The most effective alarms consist of a small sensor attached to the outside of the cloth underwear where the first drop of urine can be detected. Disposable pants should not be used (even over the cloth underwear) when a bedwetting alarm is used because the urine is wicked away differently and can inhibit the alarm from sounding quickly.

In most wearable-type alarms, a thin cord travels under the night shirt connecting the sensor to the alarm unit located on the shoulder. The newest alarms come in bright colors children like, and weigh just an ounce or two. Parents should involve the child when selecting alarm color (i.e. pink, purple, blue, etc.) which may increase a child's interest and participation.

2. Shop for comfort.

Large, bulky sensors that fit into panty liners or resemble a deck of cards placed inside the underwear are often uncomfortable. Most children, especially younger ones, are more comfortable using alarms with small sensors. Some are smaller than a postage stamp and can barely be felt when in use. Pad type alarms, which consist of flat mats placed on top of the sheets can be used for the rare child who has sensory issues or if the child refuses to wear an alarm. The greatest disadvantage of a pad alarm such as this, is that it takes more urine for the pad to sense it. However, conditioning can take place.

3. Durability is important.

Questions to ask are:

- *Are the batteries easy to replace and easily accessible?*
- *Is the alarm unit watertight to prevent urine seepage if placed in the underwear?*

When parents ask questions about cost...

- The cost of an alarm is between \$69 to \$99 – given how much the family is already spending on laundry, disposable pants (at \$18 a package), or medication (desmopressin is \$4 per pill) – the family will actually save money in the long run.
- Some insurers consider enuresis alarms to be durable medical equipment and might want to submit receipts for reimbursement. Flexible spending accounts would also cover this type of equipment.

- *Does the alarm have a separate sensor piece?*

The alarms featuring a separate sensor cord which attaches to the alarm unit are more practical than alarms that are all one piece. If breakage is to occur, it most commonly affects the sensor that attaches to the underwear. An inexpensive replacement sensor saves the family from purchasing an entire new alarm. Also, since bedwetting often affects more than one child in a family, choosing an alarm with an easily replaced sensor provides subsequent users with an essentially new system.

- *Are cleaning instructions included?* Residual urine can build up on a sensor, making it less reliable. Many alarms are easily cleaned with only soap and water.
- *Does the alarm carry a manufacturer's warranty?* Because the alarm will be in use for several months, the warranty should be for at least 6-12 months.

4. How does it connect?

Parents want a sensor that is difficult to unhook during sleep movements. Be leery of alarms that use metal snaps and hooks which come undone too easily. Some alarms will sound if the sensor does become unhooked alerting the child and family that this has occurred.

5. Listen for the alarm to sound.

Be sure your alarm makes a sound to alert the child and the parents of the need to wake to use the bathroom. While combination sound/vibration alarms add an extra dimension of arousal, alarms that vibrate-only won't wake the majority of bedwetting children (or alert their parents). Remember, it's important that the parents be alerted so they can remind their child what to do next.

Most alarms sound at 80-90 decibels when placed in the manufacturer's recommended site. Placement on the shoulder is preferred because the sound won't be muffled by blankets and is close to the ear. Some bedside units can make a louder sound because they are not as close to the child's ear.

6. Manual or auto turnoff.

Look for an alarm that continues to sound until it's attended to. While it might seem that an alarm turning itself off after a minute or two is an energy-saving feature, in reality it may take the child or parents longer than this to respond. Alarms that continue to sound until they are disconnected are better than ones that turn off after a short period of time.

7. For special-needs children only.

Caring for a child with special needs may make one type of alarm more appealing. Malem manufactures a variety of alarms: one featuring a variety of tones that rotate each time the alarm is activated and others with selectable tones, with a voice or other recordable sound or some that sound only in the caregivers room.

Pad-type alarms could be useful for children who refuse to wear shirts to bed or have sensory issues preventing them from attaching a wearable alarm. Parents can contact the Bedwetting Store at 800-214-9605 for help choosing the correct alarm for the child and their family.

Where parents can buy alarms.

Because bedwetting alarms are specialized items, general pharmacies or children's stores rarely stock them. Specialized catalogs and online stores carry the most extensive lines. The **Bedwetting Store** (www.bedwettingstore.com) offers the most comprehensive selection of bedwetting alarms, as well as other items that families with bedwetting children might need. Alarms range in price from \$69 and up, depending on features and design. (See enclosed Comparison Chart.) Many of patients' families have already spent a great deal of money on disposable pants, laundry and/or medication and will realize a savings by using an alarm to curtail the problem. Note that a few insurance companies consider bedwetting alarms to be pieces of durable medical equipment. Because each family's coverage varies, they should check with their own insurer to see the level of benefit. Flexible spending accounts could be used for this type of equipment.

Bedwetting Brief is written by Renee Mercer, Certified Pediatric Nurse Practitioner and founder of the Bedwetting Store. Renee can be reached at 1-800-214-9605.