



Bladder Dysfunction and Urine Control in Children

Urology Care
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What is Bladder Dysfunction?

Bladder dysfunction describes a range of problems with the way the bladder holds and lets go of urine, sometimes leading to wetting accidents.

Newborns and infants have a simple reflex that causes them to pass urine without control. Children normally gain control naturally as they age. The bladder holds more urine as we grow. Sphincter and pelvic floor muscles develop strength to hold back the flow of urine. And, as we age, the brain gains control over urinary function. By age seven, 90% of children have normal daytime habits and stay dry during sleep.

Wetting accidents in school-aged children can cause major stress. If left untreated, they can also lead to bladder and kidney problems for adults.

Types of Urine Control Problems for Children

School-aged children with bladder dysfunction may have a range of symptoms. Common issues are:

- **Daytime wetting:** poor bladder control during awake hours
- **Frequency:** when a child urinates more than eight times during awake hours
- **Infrequency:** when a child doesn't pass urine enough (less than three times during awake hours)
- **Urgency:** a sudden, unexpected need to pass urine
- **Hesitancy:** trouble starting or taking a long time to start urinating

- **Straining:** trouble getting urine out
- **Weak urine stream:** the flow of urine is weak or slow
- **Intermittent urine stream:** the flow of urine occurs in bursts
- **Holding maneuvers:** the child does things to avoid going to the bathroom
- **Post-micturition dribbling:** leakage of urine soon after going to the bathroom
- **Giggle Incontinence:** urine leaks out by accident with laughter

What Causes Bladder Dysfunction?

Often, bladder problems in children are caused from a bad habit that can easily be changed. Other times there may be a problem with the way the bladder and urethra work together.

Constipation is one of the most common causes for bladder dysfunction in children. This can occur when a child has less than two bowel movements per week. Stools are very firm, dry, small and hard to pass.

Talk with your healthcare provider if your child is having problems. There is hope, and there are many long-term and permanent solutions.

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How is Bladder Dysfunction in Children Treated?

Managing this issue in children is often successful. The first step is to learn which type of bladder problem your child has and why. If it's:

Constipation:

- Offer foods high in fiber. Try meals with many fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Drinking more water helps too.

Infrequency or Urgency:

- Make a timely bathroom plan with "scheduled voiding". Help your child follow a daily bathroom schedule. The goal is to retrain the bladder and sphincter muscles.

Frequency of Urination or Overactive Bladder (OAB):

- Ask your child's doctor about medication for OAB that helps your child's bladder to hold more urine, longer.

Giggle Incontinence:

- Ask your child's doctor about helpful medications, such as oxybutynin or methylphenidate (Ritalin).

Problems with the way the bladder contracts and the sphincter relaxes:

- Teach your child to perform Pelvic Floor Exercises that strengthen the area. Your child's doctor can explain "Quick flicks" (squeezing and relaxing the sphincter and pelvic floor muscles as quickly as possible) and "Kegels" (squeezing and relaxing the pelvic floor muscles more slowly each day). When done many times, these each can make the pelvic floor stronger.
- Ask your child's doctor about Biofeedback Therapy. It is an in-office procedure that teaches children how to control their sphincter and pelvic floor muscles.

Post-micturition Dribbling

- Have your child try opening her legs wider when passing urine. Weight loss may also help. If there are labial adhesions, estrogen cream can heal the area.

What Happens After Treatment?

Some children may go back to their old habits and have wetting accidents again. Retry the plans that helped in the first place. Sometimes it takes many methods over time.

It is of great value to talk with your healthcare provider if your child is having problems. There is hope, and there are many long-term and permanent solutions.

ABOUT THE UROLOGY CARE FOUNDATION

The Urology Care Foundation is the world's leading urologic Foundation – and the official Foundation of the American Urological Association. We provide information for those actively managing their urologic health and those ready to make healthy changes. Our information is based on the American Urological Association resources and is reviewed by medical experts.

To learn more, visit: UrologyHealth.org/UrologicConditions or go to UrologyHealth.org/FindAUrologist to find a doctor near you.

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