

ENURESIS AND ENCOPRESIS

What is Enuresis?

Every child, at one stage or another, wets the bed. However this can become problematic when the child repeatedly urinates in bed or wets their pants beyond the age of five, when this is involuntary and is not caused by medical conditions. This condition is referred to as enuresis.

What is Encopresis?

Encopresis or soiling is the name given to the presence of formed or semi-formed faeces (pooh) in the underwear, on a regular basis beyond the age of four years. Encopresis has two types. Primary encopresis occurs in children who have never been toilet trained, and secondary encopresis occurs in children who recommence soiling after being toilet trained for at least six months. It can also occur with or without constipation

What Causes Enuresis & Encopresis?

To assess the causes of enuresis and encopresis, psychological, emotional, physiological and anatomical factors need to be considered.

Psychological: Punitive training, ineffective practices, environmental stresses, sexual abuse, low self-esteem, sleep disorders, family dynamics may be considered.

Emotional: aggression, fear, and depression.

Physiological: Developmental delay, intellectual disability, genetic predisposition, constipation, and bladder obstruction, urinary tract infection, epilepsy, pain passing urine.

Anatomical: Low functional bladder volume, constipation or diarrhoea.

How Common is Enuresis & Encopresis?

All children experience a period of bed wetting and soiling which decreases with age. Around 5% of children between five and fifteen suffer from encopresis; less than 10% of children between the ages of six and fifteen suffer from enuresis.

How Do I Know If My Child or A Child I Know has Encopresis or Enuresis?

Usually a parent or carer becomes aware that their child is regularly urinating or soiling in bed or clothes. It may be difficult to determine the extent of the toileting difficulties. When establishing whether a child has enuresis or encopresis, it is important to consider the age of the child, their previous toilet training and the regularity of the soiling or wetting. Children may temporarily wet or soil when under stress such as during the arrival of a new baby in the family.

If you think that your child or a child you know has encopresis or enuresis it is best to seek medical advice.

Where Can I Get Help?

Enuresis and encopresis can become very frustrating for parents and often causes the child significant distress. Becoming angry can actually make the child's fears and anxieties worse as they also begin to worry about upsetting their parents and about going to the toilet! Therefore it is very important that as a parent you try to find out what is causing the enuresis or encopresis and rule out any physiological and anatomical causes.

Your family doctor or Paediatrician are important professionals to consult as they can identify and treat any medical conditions that may be contributing. If no medical, physiological and anatomical causes can be identified further advice can be sought from psychiatric or psychological services such as CAMHS to identify possible emotional and psychological causes.

Listed overleaf are contact details of services that may be of assistance to you and your child.

Reference: Promoting Continence Course, Healthlinks Education and Training Service
Heins and Ritchie (1988) Beating Sneaky Poo - Ideas for Faecal Soiling, Child and Adolescent Unit, Mental Health Branch, ACT Health Authority.

