Information and Parenting Advice on Overactive Bladder in Children

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Overactive Bladder in Children

When we hear about overactive bladder (OAB), we typically associate it with something that happens to adults – a condition that occurs as we age, perhaps, or as a consequence of childbirth. Rarely do we consider overactive bladder in children.

“Oh no,” you may think. “That can’t be right. OAB and children – that must just mean they aren’t potty trained or are acting out.”

While this may be true for some children, OAB can and does happen to children.

In fact, Cedars-Sinai notes that in children, OAB belongs under the umbrella term “dysfunctional voiding,” which also includes urinary urgency/frequency syndrome, voiding postponement, and enuresis (bedwetting). Without proper treatment, these conditions can lead to damage to the bladder and kidneys.

Causes of Overactive Bladder In Children

Pediatric OAB is caused by uncontrollable bladder spasms, which means the child has an uncontrollable urge to urinate. The muscles that are affected are the muscles surrounding the urethra, which are the muscles that control the urines flow from the body.

Additionally, pollakiuria can cause OAB. Pollakiuria is also known as frequent daytime urination syndrome.

Children with pollakiuria may have the urge to urinate every five to 10 minutes, or upwards of 30 times per day. This condition affects children ages three to eight and seems to be present only during waking hours. There are no other symptoms present, and the condition lasts only several weeks before going away spontaneously without treatment.

WebMD also notes the following possible causes of OAB:

- Consumption of allergenic foods
- Use of caffeine, which increases urinary output and may cause bladder spasms
- Anxiety-promoting events
- Infrequent urination
- Small bladder capacity
- Constipation
- Structural abnormalities of the bladder or urethra

Symptoms of OAB in Children

Symptoms of pediatric OAB may include:

- The need to urinate frequently or urgently
- Wetting the bed or pants before making it to the toilet

Treatment of Pediatric OAB

It is likely that the child will outgrow OAB. In fact, according to WebMD, “For each year after the age of 5, the number of overactive bladder cases declines by 15%.”

It does seem that a lot of OAB cases in children are related to anxiety – symptoms may subside when the anxiety-provoking event ends or decreases. However, for OAB that does not reduce or go away, there are treatment options available, such as bladder training and medication.

Bladder training allows the child to strengthen the muscles of and around the bladder and urethra to control urination. These exercises will enable the child to prevent urinating when they do not want to and also to anticipate the urge to urinate. Part of bladder training may also be to urinate on a schedule, such as urinating every two hours.

A popular OAB medication for the pediatric population is oxybutynin; it works to relax the bladder muscles. By relaxing the bladder muscles, it helps to prevent urgent, uncontrolled urinary issues. Other OAB medications are available as well.

Some children have frequent urinary tract infections that can exacerbate OAB. For these children, prescribing antibiotics will be vital in treating the UTI, thus decreasing the spasms that are worsening the symptoms.

Diet and OAB

As with adults, certain foods may exacerbate OAB symptoms. Avoiding foods that “trigger” symptoms is essential.

For example, caffeine is a culprit for a lot of people. It is doubtful that children in the three to eight age group are slugging down the coffee, but some children may be drinking soda or hot chocolate, which contains caffeine. Cutting back on these beverages may improve symptoms.

Other food groups that are known to exacerbate OAB symptoms are artificial sweeteners, acidic fruits and vegetables, and spicy foods. Trial cutting these foods out of your child’s diet, then adding them back in slowly. By adding them back in, you can pinpoint which foods are the culprit.

It is important to note that you may find quite a few foods that will worsen symptoms, while you may also find no foods that will provoke symptoms. Everyone is different, so it is essential to look carefully at your own body.