

Restless Leg Syndrome



University Services

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Restless legs syndrome (RLS) is a neurological disorder characterized by unpleasant sensations in the legs and an uncontrollable urge to move when at rest in an effort to relieve these feelings. RLS sensations are often described by people as burning, creeping, tugging, or like insects crawling inside the legs. The sensations range in severity from uncomfortable, to irritating, to painful.

Those With RLS vs. Those Without		
	WITH	WITHOUT
Stressed	37%	21%
Tired	35%	20%
Pessimistic	16%	10%
Angry	15%	6%
Prefer To Be Alone	34%	22%

“Worms crawl under my skin if I don’t keep moving my legs”

“My legs decide they want to run, and I have to follow”

“After I get in bed a gremlin grabs my legs and leads me around like a puppet.”

Have you even thought or heard something like this? Then you probably have Restless Leg Syndrome.

Talk About Sleep With Your Health Care Professional

How Common Is RLS?

10% of people in the United States experience the discomfort of RLS at some time in their lives. The disorder is more common in older individuals but can occur at any age in both men and women. Over the course of a year, RLS may come and go without any obvious reason.

Symptoms:

- **Uncomfortable sensations in the legs:** usually described as a creeping or crawling feeling, but sometimes as a tingling, cramping, burning, or just plain pain. (The arms may also be affected, but that's much less common.)
- **The need to move the legs:** to relieve the discomfort, by stretching, bending, rubbing the legs, tossing or turning in bed, or getting up and pacing the floor. Moving usually offers some temporary relief of symptoms.
- **Discomfort when lying down:** especially when you're trying to fall asleep at night, or during other forms of inactivity, including just sitting.
- **Difficulty falling or staying asleep.**
- **Most discomfort occurs late in the day and at night.**

What Causes RLS?

The cause of RLS is still unknown, but the symptoms tend to worsen over the years and become more severe in middle-to-old age. The fact that it occurs three to five times more frequently in first-degree relatives of people with RLS than in people without RLS suggests that heredity may be involved.

Pregnancy or hormonal changes may temporarily worsen RLS symptoms. Some cases of RLS are associated with iron deficiency anemia or nerve damage in the legs due to diabetes, kidney problems, alcoholism and Parkinson's disease. Stress, diet or other environmental factors may play a role for some people. All of these cases are said to be *secondary RLS*.

Treatment:

The first step in treating RLS is to determine whether related conditions (such as iron deficiency anemia, diabetes, arthritis, or the use of antidepressant medications) are contributing to the symptoms and movements. Sometimes proper diagnosis and treatment of these conditions may relieve the symptoms, although many patients find the disturbing movements continue.

The next step is to try home remedies which have been effective for some people with RLS.

Home Remedies

- Hot bath
- Leg massage
- Applied heat
- Ice packs
- Aspirin
- Exercise
- Yoga
- Acupressure
- Vibration
- Elimination of caffeine

When home remedies are not effective RLS can be treated with medication. In May 2005, a drug called Requip, that is commonly used to treat Parkinson's disease was given FDA approval at lower doses for the treatment of RLS after patients in clinical trials enjoyed more and better quality sleep as early as one week after starting treatment.

Other drugs have been shown to alleviate RLS symptoms such as Dopamine agonist, Benzodiazepines, Anticonvulsants, and Opioids, but they usually have many side effects.



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