

WHAT IS RESTLESS LEGS SYNDROME (RLS)?

Quick Facts:

Restless legs syndrome (RLS) is a common sleep disorder. RLS can prevent people from falling asleep or staying asleep. It can lead to daytime tiredness and mood problems. There are many treatments available for this disease. Treatment options include several types of medicines as well as non-medication options.

KEY POINTS:

- **Restless leg symptoms include Feeling a strong urge to move your legs when you are resting or sitting still. You also may have a creepy-crawly, tugging, itchy or tingly sensation.**
- **Many people who have RLS also kick or jerk their legs while sleeping.**
- **Symptoms get better when you walk, stretch or kick. They may return once you stop moving.**
- **Symptoms are worse in the evening or nighttime hours.**
- **Symptoms are not caused by leg cramps, muscles aches or arthritis.**



How Can I Learn More?

- Talk to your board-certified sleep medicine physician.
- Visit www.sleepeducation.org

Am I At Risk?

Restless legs syndrome can occur at any age, but it is more common in older adults. RLS can be hereditary; about 50% of people with RLS have family members with the disease. People who are pregnant, have kidney disease, or other neurologic diseases may be at higher risk of having RLS.

People with anemia or low iron levels may have more severe RLS symptoms. Some drugs used to treat depression, nausea and allergies can make RLS symptoms worse.

GENERAL OVERVIEW:

Restless legs syndrome affects about 7% of the population. About 3% of people experience moderate to severe symptoms. Symptoms of RLS can make it difficult to fall asleep and stay asleep. You may wake up and need to

pace the floor to relieve symptoms. RLS may cause you to feel tired during the day. Some people with RLS also report worsening of anxiety or depression.

Researchers are trying to determine the exact cause of RLS. It may be caused by changes in certain brain chemicals, such as dopamine. RLS also may be genetic; it is more common among family members. RLS symptoms become more severe in people who have iron deficiency.

There is no specific test to detect RLS. Your doctor will review your symptoms and determine if you have the disease. Sometimes a sleep study is needed to determine if another sleep disorder is disturbing your sleep, but a sleep study is not necessary for the diagnosis of RLS.

Activities such as exercise, leg massages and warm baths can help reduce mild RLS symptoms. Prescription medications can be helpful if you have more severe symptoms. Your doctor will help you decide if a medication is the best option for you. Some medications need to be taken daily at the

same time of day. Others need to be taken only when symptoms bother you. Your doctor may recommend iron supplements if your iron levels are low.

TIPS:

In addition to taking medications, many other strategies can help ease symptoms of restless legs syndrome:

- Eat a well-balanced diet including foods rich in iron.
- Get some exercise every day.
- Stretch or massage the legs when you notice RLS symptoms.
- Use heating pads on your legs when you are awake or take a warm bath to reduce symptoms.
- Reduce your level of stress.
- Limit caffeine and alcohol and do not smoke. All of these can worsen RLS.

➔ Next Steps:

- Talk with your doctor about your symptoms. It may help to write down your symptoms, including the time of day when they occur.
- Discuss all of your medications and herbal supplements with your doctor. Some of these could cause RLS symptoms or make them worse.
- Your doctor may test your iron levels.
- Your doctor may schedule you for a sleep study if you have symptoms of another sleep disorder such as sleep apnea.



Questions For Your Physician

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your doctor.



Sample Questions:

Why do I feel tired all the time?
I'm active, why would I have restless legs
when I'm sitting?