



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Restless legs syndrome (RLS) is a disorder that causes unpleasant sensations in the legs. RLS occurs more often in women than in men. It may begin at any age, even as early as infancy. Patients with severe symptoms are usually middle-aged or older.

More than 80% of people with RLS also have a more common condition known as periodic limb movement disorder (PLMD). PLMD involves involuntary leg twitching or jerking movements during sleep. They typically occur every 10 to 60 seconds, sometimes throughout the night. People have no control over them.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

The main symptom of RLS involves sensations in the legs. They are often described as burning, creeping, tugging, or like insects crawling inside the legs.

They usually occur deep inside the leg, between the knee and ankle. More rarely, they occur in the feet, thighs, arms, and hands. The sensations usually affect both sides of the body.

The sensations range in severity from uncomfortable, to irritating, to painful. They may come and go.

Lying down and trying to relax causes the symptoms. Symptoms may be less apparent during the day and more severe in the evening or at night. They cause difficulty in falling, and staying, asleep.

Long car trips, sitting in a movie theater, long airplane trips, or relaxation exercises can trigger the symptoms.

CAUSES

In most cases, the cause of RLS is unknown. In others, there are certain factors or conditions that may be related to RLS, but it is unknown if they actually cause it.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Family history of RLS.
- Low iron levels or anemia.
- Chronic diseases such as kidney failure, diabetes, Parkinson's disease, and peripheral neuropathy.
- Pregnancy.
- Certain drugs.
- Caffeine, alcohol, and tobacco may aggravate or trigger symptoms in some patients.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

None known.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- There is no cure. Symptoms may disappear for weeks or months, but usually return. Treatment can reduce the symptoms and increase periods of restful sleep.
- With pregnancy, RLS usually stops by 4 weeks after delivery.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Left untreated, the condition causes exhaustion and daytime fatigue.
- Symptoms may gradually worsen with age.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

Your health care provider will do a physical exam and ask questions about your symptoms and activities. Medical tests may be done to identify any medical disorder that may be a factor in the symptoms.

Treatment will be given for any disorder diagnosed. Treatment options for RLS may include lifestyle changes and drugs or supplements.

- Don't smoke. Find a plan that will help you to quit.
- A regular sleep pattern can help reduce symptoms. Try to go to bed and get up at the same times each day.
- Taking a hot bath, massaging the legs, or using a heating pad or ice pack may help relieve symptoms.

To learn more: Restless Legs Syndrome Foundation, 819 Second Street, SW, Rochester, MN 55902-2985; (507) 287-6465 (not toll free); website: www.rls.org.

MEDICATIONS

No one drug works for everyone with RLS. There are several options and your health care provider will discuss their benefits and side effects with you. If one type doesn't help, another can be tried.

- Diet supplements may be recommended.
- If a drug you take could be a cause of RLS, you may be advised to change the dose or take a different drug.

ACTIVITY

A program of regular, moderate exercise may help you sleep better. Excessive exercise may worsen symptoms.

DIET

Avoid caffeine and alcohol. They may trigger symptoms.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of restless legs syndrome.
- Symptoms continue despite treatment.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page