



Malvern Sleep Clinic

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RESTLESS LEGS SYNDROME

Restless legs syndrome (RLS) is a neurological disorder characterized by throbbing, pulling, creeping, or other unpleasant sensations in the legs and an uncontrollable urge to move them. Symptoms occur primarily at night when a person is relaxing or at rest. Moving the legs relieves the discomfort.

The cause of restless legs syndrome is unknown. It can run in families, and there is likely a genetic basis to some cases. Restless legs syndrome can also be related to low iron. Chronic diseases, such as diabetes and kidney disease, are at increased risk for developing restless legs syndrome. Pregnancy also increases the incidence.

As many as 10 percent of the U.S. population may suffer from RLS. RLS occurs in both men and women, with a 2:1 incidence in women. It may begin at any age, but very common in middle-aged or older individuals. The symptoms typically become more frequent and last longer with age.

The symptoms of restless legs syndrome include:

- **Leg discomfort.** creepy, crawly, painful, or tingling sensations in the legs. These sensations usually occur at bedtime but can also occur at other times of inactivity, such as during long car rides or while watching a movie.
- **Leg movements.** To relieve the leg discomfort, people have an irresistible urge to move their legs, by tossing and turning while lying in bed, or getting out of the bed and walking.
- **Sleep disruption.** It takes a long time to fall asleep because of the leg discomfort and need to move. They may also have difficulty staying asleep.
- **Daytime sleepiness.** The difficulties falling asleep and staying asleep can result in significant daytime sleepiness.
- **Personality and performance problems.** Those with restless legs syndrome may have personality changes and work/school performance problems, such as inattentiveness and irritability, hyperactivity, impulsivity, moodiness, which are the result of the sleep disruption.

There is no specific test for RLS. The four basic criteria for diagnosing the disorder are: Symptoms that are worse at night and are absent or negligible in the morning; a strong urge to move their legs; Sensory symptoms that are triggered by rest, relaxation, or sleep; and Sensory symptoms that are relieved with movement and the relief persist as long as the movement continues.

There is no known cure for restless leg syndrome. Treatment is aimed at reducing stress and helping the muscles relax. The following techniques may help:

- Gentle stretching exercises
- Massage
- Warm baths

- Low doses of Mirapex or Requip
- If your sleep is severely disrupted, Sinemet, Gabapentin or Clonazepam can help. However, these medications may cause daytime sleepiness.
- Patients with iron deficiency should receive iron supplements.
- Low doses of narcotics may sometimes relieve symptoms of restless leg syndrome.