

# FACT SHEET

## SLEEP DISORDERS



THE GEORGE  
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### Schedule an Appointment:

To schedule an appointment, please call 1-888-4GW-DOCS

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There are many types of sleep disorders that collectively affect about 60 million Americans. The most common sleep disorders include:

- Insomnia- the inability to fall asleep or stay asleep
- Periodic Limb Movement Disorder (PLMD)- periodic movements or jerks that are involuntary while one is sleeping, occurring at 30-second intervals
- Obstructive Sleep Apnea- interrupted breathing while sleeping, often accompanied by snoring
- Restless Legs Syndrome (RLS)- the prickling or tingling sensation in the legs and feet which requires one to relieve this feeling by moving the legs while still asleep
- Narcolepsy- overwhelming daytime feelings of sleepiness that cause someone to fall into a sleep attack.

Any problem during sleep is categorized as a Sleep Disorder—difficulty in falling asleep, staying asleep, waking up or abnormal behavior while asleep such as night terrors or sleep walking.

### Risk Factors

The risk factors are very similar between each sleep disorder, but some are very specific.

For people with insomnia, the risk factors include physical illness, jet lag, depression, anxiety or stress, poor sleeping environment, caffeine, alcohol or other drugs, use of certain medications, heavy smoking, physical discomfort, diet and daytime napping.

The causes of PLMD often are unclear, but frequently are similar to the causes of RLS. Antidepressant medicines or kidney disease may have some effect. In addition, those who suffer from narcolepsy also may experience this disorder.

Risk factors associated with sleep apnea include obesity, short necks and small jaws, high blood pressure, smoking or use of alcohol or sedatives, male gender and older in age, a narrowed passageway in the throat and family history.

RLS is not known to be specifically caused by any one medical condition, but it is sometimes linked with those who also suffer from peripheral neuropathy, iron deficiency or kidney failure.

Those with narcolepsy also may have family members who are narcoleptic, yet most do not. Usual causes are genetics, but also an imbalance in brain chemicals.

### Symptoms

Similar to the risk factors, the different symptoms will depend on your disorder. But the usual symptoms of a sleep disorder include:

- Awakening during the night
- Difficulty falling asleep
- Excessive daytime drowsiness
- Loud snoring
- Episodes of stopped breathing
- Sleep attacks during the day
- Daytime fatigue
- Depressed mood
- Anxiety
- Difficulty concentrating
- Apathy
- Irritability
- Loss of memory, or complaints of decreased memory
- Lower leg movement during sleep

### Detection and Diagnosis

When diagnosing your disorder, your doctor will be interviewing you to establish a profile of your sleeping pattern. Depending on your symptoms, one of the following tests may be prescribed:

- Sleep diary - recording your sleep pattern every night for a few weeks.
- “At Home Sleep Monitoring” Test - A test performed at home with portable sleep equipment so as not to disrupt your daily life.
- Actigraphy - assesses the sleep-wake patterns of the body over time by wearing a wrist-worn device that measures movement.
- Mental Health Exam - sleep disorders often have been linked to depression, anxiety or some other mental health issue, which may be affecting your sleep.
- Polysomnography - gives a detailed study of the sleep cycles and stages your body experiences using continuous recordings of your brain waves. The test is performed during a night’s sleep at the Sleep Center. Small sensors are placed on various parts of your body to document the brain waves.

### Treatment Options

Once a sleep disorder has been diagnosed and other possible medical conditions have been resolved, you can be treated appropriately. No matter what condition is diagnosed, it is often necessary to eliminate some controllable

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factors that are affecting your sleep. Some of these include consuming less or eliminating caffeine from your diet and minimizing light and noise to best suit your sleep needs. It also may be necessary to use the Bright-Light Treatment, which helps to relieve circadian rhythm disorders.

### *Specific treatments by disorder :*

Insomnia usually is treated with medication and the learning of behavioral techniques. It is quite helpful to maintain a regulated sleep pattern and not to nap during the day.

PLMD often is treated through medication such as benzodiazepines, dopaminergic agents, anticonvulsant agents and GABA agonists.

Sleep apnea often is treated with a mask that emits continuous positive airway pressure while the patient is asleep. An alternative is a dental jaw piece that keeps the jaw in place to promote proper breathing during sleep. Another method is to bring additional oxygen into the lungs through various devices while sleeping. Sometimes it is necessary to have nose or throat surgery to correct any obstructions in those areas. Weight loss often is necessary. Snoring, a usual aspect of sleep apnea, can be alleviated by sleeping on your side and avoiding alcohol, tobacco, sleeping pills and sedatives.

Restless leg syndrome is treated by looking at the underlying cause of the disorder, often accompanied by opiate or dopaminergic agonists. Also, it may be necessary to cut caffeine from your diet and to try relaxing your muscles before getting into bed. Hot or cold packs on your legs may be soothing.

Narcolepsy has no specific cure but can be controlled by the use of medication, such as Ritalin, Dexedrine, and Provigil. Scheduled naps during the day may be necessary.

Night terrors have several treatments. The patient can be hypnotized, taught guided imagery techniques or given benzodiazepines. Precautionary measures must be taken to secure the patient's safety during nighttime walking. In addition to these treatments, it is necessary for the patient to have a feeling of comfort and love before going to bed. This will help to soothe the mind before sleep.

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