

Get the inside scoop on restless kicking during sleep

BY VICTORIA WRIGHT
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Restless legs syndrome might sound like a strange condition, but if you ever felt uncomfortable sensations in your feet or legs, while lying or sitting still, you may be familiar with RLS. These sensations, which might feel like bugs crawling under the skin, typically improve, at least briefly, after moving your legs or feet. Frequently, this can cause difficulty falling or staying asleep and often results in insomnia.

"The restless sensations result from signals from the nerves in the legs that are not properly filtered by the central nervous system and inappropriately reach the brain, causing a static-feeling sensation," said Dr. Jerald Simmons, M.D., a neurologist and sleep disorders specialist who directs the Sadler Clinic Sleep Disorders Center. "People with this problem move their legs or feet in order to create stimulation that drowns out the static sensation. Once asleep, the leg twitches in response to the static signals from the nerves. These leg movements can result in brief awakenings, making a person feel fatigued and unrested in the morning. This condition can frequently cause difficulty falling or staying asleep."

There is help for this disorder, and Simmons and his

trained team provide proper treatment for this condition. The most appropriate medications for RLS work by increasing dopamine activity within certain parts of the central nervous system. This dopamine activity, in essence, filters out these static sensations. Sedating or numbing medications are frequently prescribed by doctors but are not recommended as a first-line therapy in treating this condition, according to Simmons and the standards set forth by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine.

Up to 10 percent of the U.S. population may have RLS. Many people have a mild form of the disorder, but RLS severely affects the lives of millions of individuals. At least 4 percent of the population has this condition to a level that is worthy of treatment. RLS often runs in families. In July 2007, researchers discovered a gene variant that is linked with RLS, according to the Restless Legs Syndrome Foundation.

"RLS can be passed on genetically and occur in family members, but other causes such as nerve damage can also be a factor," Simmons said. "As well, iron deficiency can cause RLS because the brain needs iron to produce

dopamine and iron is also used by the nerve cell at the dopamine receptor site as a co-factor to trigger the dopamine receptor activity."

When it is passed on genetically, it can start causing symptoms at an early age. It is now recognized that in children, RLS can contribute to ADHD symptoms. Many children are placed on stimulant medications instead of treatment that addresses the RLS problem. According to the Restless Legs Syndrome Foundation, there are various medications that can make RLS worse, to include some over-the-counter medications, such as antihistamines (like Benadryl), which is found in many cold, allergy and over-the-counter sleeping pills.

Properly diagnosing and treating RLS in adults or children can result in improved sleep and daytime functioning. By not getting proper sleep, other medical conditions can have enhanced impairment in a persons overall well being. RLS also can be seen in people with other medical conditions, and simultaneously treating the RLS component can provide a significant overall improvement in energy level and restoration of health.

For more information about RLS and sleep disorders, visit www.HoustonSleep.Net or call 281-297-6305 for an office visit.



SIMMONS