



Narcolepsy

What is Narcolepsy?

Narcolepsy is a chronic sleep disorder characterized by overwhelming daytime drowsiness and sudden attacks of sleep. People with narcolepsy often find it difficult to stay awake for long periods of time, regardless of the circumstances. Narcolepsy can cause serious disruptions in your daily routine. Narcolepsy is a chronic condition for which there's no cure.



Symptoms

Excessive Daytime Sleepiness: People with narcolepsy fall asleep without warning, anywhere, anytime.

Cataplexy: This condition is a sudden loss of muscle control. It can cause several physical changes, from slurred speech to complete weakness of most muscles, and may last up to a few minutes. Not everyone with narcolepsy experiences cataplexy.

Sleep Paralysis: A brief episode of inability to move or speak while falling asleep or upon waking.

Hallucinations: These can occur upon waking or as you fall asleep. They may be particularly vivid and frightening because you may not be fully asleep when you begin dreaming and you experience your dreams as reality.

REM (Rapid Eye Movement) Sleep: REM sleep is typically when most dreaming happens. REM sleep can occur at any time of the day in people with narcolepsy. People with narcolepsy often transition quickly to REM sleep, usually within 15 minutes of falling asleep.

Diagnosis

Based on excessive daytime sleepiness and sudden loss of muscle tone, your doctor may make a preliminary diagnosis. After initial diagnosis your doctor may ask you to keep sleep records and refer you to a sleep specialist for:

- ❖ **Polysomnography (sleep study)** – This test records your brain waves, the oxygen level in your blood, heart rate and breathing, as well as eye and leg movements during the study.
- ❖ **Multiple Sleep Latency Test** - This examination measures how long it takes you to fall asleep during the day. You'll be asked to take four or five naps, each nap two hours apart. Specialists will observe your sleep patterns. People who have narcolepsy fall asleep easily and enter into rapid eye movement (REM) sleep quickly.



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What is the Treatment for Narcolepsy?

There is no cure for narcolepsy, but medications can help you manage the symptoms.

Drugs that stimulate the central nervous system are the primary treatment to help people with narcolepsy stay awake during the day.

Complications

Public Misunderstanding: Narcolepsy may cause serious problems for you professionally and personally. Others might see you as lazy or lethargic. Your performance may suffer at school or work.

Interference with Relationships: Intense feelings, such as anger or joy, can trigger signs of narcolepsy such as cataplexy, causing affected people to withdraw from emotional interactions.

Physical harm: Sleep attacks may result in physical harm. You're at increased risk of a car accident if you have an attack while driving. Your risk of cuts and burns is greater if you fall asleep while preparing food.

Obesity: People with narcolepsy are more likely to be overweight. The weight gain may be related to a low metabolism.

Lifestyle Changes

- ❖ Go to sleep at the same time each night.
- ❖ Wake up at the same time each morning.
- ❖ Get at least 8 hours of sleep each night.
- ❖ Schedule two 15-minute naps during the day
- ❖ Get some form of exercise every day.
- ❖ Avoid things that can disrupt your sleep, such as tobacco, alcohol, caffeine and drugs.
- ❖ Avoid using electronics in bed or close to bedtime.