



Sleep Education - Narcolepsy

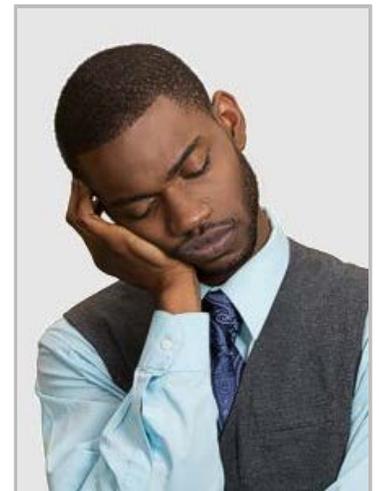
Narcolepsy is a condition in which the brain is unable to regulate the sleep-wake cycles normally. Prevalence is thought to be less than one percent of the population. Onset tends to occur in adolescent to young adulthood years, however symptoms can appear later in life too.

While narcolepsy affects both sexes, it does have a slightly higher risk in men. Research also suggests that there is a genetic component to narcolepsy.

Symptoms of Narcolepsy

Some symptoms of narcolepsy include:

- Excessive daytime sleepiness (EDS)
- Sleep attacks may occur without warning and are hard to resist
- Cataplexy or sudden loss of muscle control - often triggered by highly stressful or emotional situations
- Sleep paralysis or a feeling of not being able to talk or move - may occur when falling asleep or waking up.
- Insomnia
- Fatigue
- Poor memory
- Depression
- Vivid dreams



Treatment of Narcolepsy

Treatment of narcolepsy can help reduce symptoms and create a better quality of life.

While medication may be prescribed by your doctor, lifestyle adjustments may also be useful in helping you cope with your symptoms.

Another symptom of narcolepsy may include hypnogogic hallucinations or experiencing images, sounds, or sensations that are not really present. This usually occurs as the person is falling asleep or waking up. Often hallucinations produce a feeling of dread or fear, and can occur in conjunction with sleep paralysis.

Understanding REM (Rapid Eye Movement) Sleep is important in narcolepsy. REM is the dreaming portion of sleep and usually occurs after the first 90 min of sleep. For a narcoleptic patient, REM can occur much sooner.



Driving

When driving, be aware of when your narcolepsy symptoms are occurring and always pull off the road to find a safe place to take a nap.

Diagnosis and Treatment

Diagnosis of narcolepsy should be done by a trained sleep professional. A complete medical and family history is important in the diagnosis of any disorder. Be prepared to answer questions concerning these areas. It's also important to be aware of any particular sleep habits and/or any symptoms you may be experiencing. It might be helpful to keep a sleep diary for two weeks prior to your appointment. Record all pertinent details concerning your sleep patterns and any symptoms. A [sleep study](#) may be needed for a definitive diagnosis to be made.

Treatment of narcolepsy can help reduce symptoms and hopefully create a better quality of life. While medication may be prescribed by your doctor, lifestyle adjustments might also be useful in helping you cope with your symptoms. Listed below are some suggestions:

- Keep a regular sleep schedule.
- Exercise regularly but avoid strenuous exercise two to four hours before bedtime.
- Avoid or limit caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol intake.
- Educate those you interact with on a daily basis about the disorder and how it may affect your relations with them.
- Adjust your schedule to allow for short naps during the day.
- When driving be aware of when your symptoms are occurring. Always pull off the road and find a safe place to take a nap.

Narcolepsy support groups can offer a network of support, empathy, and learning from those who know what it's like to live with this disorder. The references listed below have resources to help you find a local support group.

References: [National Sleep Foundation](#) | [Narcolepsy Network](#)

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