

The Symptoms of Sleep Disorders

Sleeping disorders can range from minor to severe and can include insomnia, sleep apnea, sleepwalking, narcolepsy and many more. Often, problems with sleeping are both minor and temporary and can be triggered by certain things: caffeine or alcohol late in the day, stress, medications, illness, depression, a new home, and age. Seniors report more insomnia than any other age group. Depending upon the symptoms, the severity, and the duration of your sleeping issues, you may or may not have a true sleep disorder.

Look for the following symptoms in yourself or your partner and if you see any of them you may have a disorder and should make a trip to the doctor.

- Waking frequently during the night and having difficulty falling back to sleep
- Difficulty falling asleep right away at night
- Sleepiness and lack of energy during the day
- Loud and frequent snoring
- Gasping or choking in the night
- Waking up feeling short of breath or with chest pains or a headache
- Uncomfortable feeling in the legs with a feeling of needing to move, which is worse at night
- Jerking or cramping in legs at night
- Feeling unable to move when waking up or falling asleep
- Starting to dream before fully sleeping
- Feeling weak while experiencing strong emotions

Insomnia

Insomnia is the most common type of sleep disorder experienced by people of any age, but is more prevalent in the aging population. It takes two different forms, or may present as a combination of the two. Insomniacs may have trouble getting to sleep when going to bed or may wake frequently in the night and find it difficult to get back to sleep. Many cases of insomnia are not very serious and can be treated without using medication. Changing habits such as no longer drinking late in the day or evening, avoiding stress, and getting plenty of exercise can often solve the problem. If you find the symptoms are severe and persistent, you should see your doctor.

Sleep Apnea

Sleep apnea is also fairly common and can be quite serious. In people with sleep apnea, breathing stops during the night due to an upper airway blockage. This causes the sufferer to wake several times in the night, and while they often don't remember waking up, they will feel the effects of interrupted sleep throughout the day. This disorder can be very serious because of the potential to stop breathing and to not start again. Sleep apnea can often be successfully treated with changes such as losing weight, elevating the head, sleeping on your side or with

continuous positive airway pressure via a device that provides a stream of air during the night.

Restless Leg Syndrome (RLS)

If you feel a tingling, creeping, or just plain uncomfortable sensation in your legs, especially at night, you may suffer from RLS. The feeling is usually accompanied by a need to move. Movement of the legs will relieve the feeling, leaving you unable to fall asleep easily each night. Symptoms of RLS can sometimes be relieved with stretches, exercise or healthy diet. When these changes do not help alleviate the tingling, medications can be used.

Narcolepsy

While often portrayed in movies and on television as a humorous disorder, narcolepsy can be anything but funny. Narcoleptics suffer from a neurological disorder that affects a part of the brain that controls sleeping and waking. They can fall asleep at any time including while working, driving or operating dangerous equipment. The most common symptoms of narcolepsy are severe and frequent drowsiness throughout the day, hallucinations, feelings of paralysis when drifting off to sleep or when waking up, and cataplexy. Cataplexy is the only symptom unique to narcolepsy and is a loss of muscle function and control. It occurs mostly while the sufferer is experiencing strong emotions. If you find you have these symptoms, you need to see a doctor immediately.

Insomnia, RLS, narcolepsy, and sleep apnea are just a few of the more common sleeping disorders that people can suffer from. Less common conditions include sleepwalking, rapid eye movement disorder, hypersomnia, hypopnea, night terrors and bruxism. These can range from severe to mild, temporary to lifelong. Regardless of the disorder, any difficulty with sleep can be disruptive and damaging to your everyday life. If you experience any sleeping disorder symptoms that are severe enough to disrupt your daily activities, you should consult your doctor for treatment.