

## TREATMENT OPTIONS FOR RESTLESS LEGS SYNDROME (RLS)

### **i** Quick Facts:

Restless legs syndrome (RLS) is a common disease in which uncomfortable leg sensations can prevent people from falling asleep or staying asleep. It can lead to daytime tiredness and mood problems. There are many treatments available for this disease including medication and non-medication options.

### KEY POINTS:

- **There are several prescription medications used in treating RLS. Your doctor can help you determine the most appropriate medication to use.**
- **Iron supplements can help relieve symptoms in people who are iron deficient.**
- **Non-medication options are also extremely important in managing symptoms.**



### **?** How Can I Learn More?

- Talk to your board-certified sleep medicine physician.
- Visit [www.sleepeducation.org](http://www.sleepeducation.org)

### **!** Who Should Be Treated?

Some people do not require any medications for RLS. Many people find relief through regular exercise and using warm baths or massaging the legs when they feel symptoms. However, some people have very intense symptoms which can prevent sleep and lead to daytime tiredness. In these cases, medications may be considered.

People with anemia or low iron levels may have more severe RLS symptoms. Some drugs used to treat depression, nausea, and allergies can make RLS symptoms worse. Sometimes using iron supplements or changing medications can help with RLS symptoms.

### GENERAL OVERVIEW:

Restless legs syndrome (also called Willis-Ekbom disease) affects about 7% of the population, with about 3% experiencing moderate to severe symptoms. Symptoms of RLS can make it difficult to fall asleep and stay asleep. Often patients wake up and need to pace the floor to relieve symptoms. In the setting of poor sleep, people may feel tired during the day and some people with RLS report worsening of anxiety or depression.

If leg sensations are only mildly distressing or if they do not occur on a regular basis, activities such

as exercise, leg massage, and warm baths may be all that is required. In people who have more significant or frequent symptoms, prescription medications can be used. Your healthcare provider can help you decide if medications are needed. Some medications need to be taken at the same time each day and some can be taken only when symptoms are bothersome. Your healthcare provider may recommend iron supplements if your iron levels are low.

## TIPS:

The treatment for each circadian rhythm sleep-wake disorder is different. Try to get enough sleep and maintain good sleep habits as this can help reduce symptoms.

- Maintain a consistent sleep-wake schedule, including weekends and vacations.
- Track the timing of your sleep by using a sleep diary (sleep log) for 2 weeks.
- Do not take more than a 20-minute nap during the day.
- Do not spend a lot of time awake in bed. If you have difficulty falling asleep get out of bed and try reading a book or doing another activity that will make you sleepy.
- Limit caffeine and alcohol and do not smoke.

### ➔ Next Steps:

- Talk with your primary healthcare provider about your symptoms. It may help to write down your symptoms including the time of day when they occur. See a sleep specialist if recommended.
- Go over all of your medications and herbal aids with your healthcare providers to determine if any of these could cause/worsen your RLS symptoms.
- Iron testing may be recommended by your provider. A sleep study may be recommended to make sure there are no other problems which could disturb your sleep (like sleep apnea).



### Questions For Your Physician

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

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### Sample Questions:

Why do I feel tired all the time?

Why do I wake up so early in the morning?

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