Restless Legs Syndrome

Restless legs syndrome is a sensori-*motor* (movement) disorder. The symptoms include uncomfortable sensations in the legs. These leg sensations are worse during periods of inactivity or rest. They are also worse while sitting or lying down. There is often a positive family history of the disorder. Individuals that have the disorder describe sensations of:

- Pulling.
- Drawing.
- Crawling.
- Worming.
- Boring.
- Tingling.
- Pins and Needles.
- Prickly.
- Painful.

The sensations are usually accompanied by an overwhelming urge to move the legs. Sudden muscle jerks may also occur. Movement provides temporary relief from the discomfort. In rare cases, the arms may also be affected. Symptoms may interfere with sleep onset (*sleep onset insomnia*). Research suggests that restless legs syndrome is related to *periodic limb movement disorder* (PLMD). PLMD is another more common motor disorder. It also causes interrupted sleep. The symptoms often exhibit circadian rhythmicity in their peak occurrence during awakening hours.

TREATMENT

Treatment for restless legs syndrome is symptomatic. This means that the symptoms are treated. Massage and application of cold compresses may provide temporary relief. Medications effective in relieving the symptoms include:

- Temazepam.
- Levodopa/Carbidopa.
- Bromocriptine.
- Pergolide Mesylate.
- Oxycodone.
- Propoxyphene.
- Codeine.

However, many of these medications have side effects. Current research suggests correction of iron deficiency may improve symptoms for some patients.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN

Restless legs syndrome is a life-long condition. There is no cure. Symptoms may gradually worsen with age. The most disabling feature is the sleep onset insomnia. It can be severe.

RESEARCH ON RESTLESS LEGS SYNDROME

The NINDS (The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke) supports a large program of basic and clinical research. The research is aimed at finding out what causes motor disorders. These disorder include restless legs syndrome. These disorders also include those associated with sleep changes. The goal of this research is to find out ways to prevent, diagnose, treat, and find cures for motor disorders. **Researchers are always working to learn more about this problem.**

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