

NARCOLEPSY QUICK FACTS

Narcolepsy is a chronic neurological condition that impairs the brain's ability to regulate the sleep-wake cycle. It affects 1 in 2,000 people—200,000 Americans and 3 million people worldwide.

NARCOLEPSY SYMPTOMS

Symptoms vary by person but may include:

- **Excessive daytime sleepiness:** Periods of extreme sleepiness during the day that feel comparable to how someone without narcolepsy would feel after staying awake for 48-72 hours. Often resulting in difficulty concentrating and staying alert.
- **Cataplexy:** Striking, sudden episodes of muscle weakness usually triggered by emotions such as laughter, exhilaration, surprise, or anger. The severity may vary from a slackening of the jaw or buckling of the knees to falling down. The duration may be for a few seconds to several minutes and the person remains fully conscious (even if unable to speak) during the episode.
- **Hypnagogic and hypnopompic hallucinations:** Visual, auditory, or tactile hallucinations upon falling asleep or waking up.
- **Sleep paralysis:** The inability to move for a few seconds or minutes upon falling asleep or waking up. It is often accompanied by hypnagogic or hypnopompic hallucinations.
- **Disrupted nighttime sleep:** Unlike public perceptions, people with narcolepsy do not sleep all the time. Timing of sleepiness is "off" with narcolepsy so one may fight sleepiness during the day but struggle to sleep at night.

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SCIENCE OF NARCOLEPSY

Recent research suggests that narcolepsy with cataplexy is caused by a lack of hypocretin, a key neurotransmitter that helps sustain alertness and regulate the sleep-wake cycle. Less is known about what causes narcolepsy without cataplexy, the other form of the condition.

DIAGNOSIS

If you suspect that you or a loved one may be experiencing symptoms of narcolepsy, it's important to consult with a board-certified sleep specialist.

NARCOLEPSY TREATMENT

Treatments are available today and can improve symptoms of excessive daytime sleepiness and cataplexy. Symptom management varies widely by person and it often takes a long time to find an optimal combination of treatments.

RAISING AWARENESS

Because of low awareness (even among physicians) and misperceptions, there is an average of 8 to 15 years between narcolepsy symptom onset and diagnosis. It's estimated that the majority of people with narcolepsy are currently undiagnosed or misdiagnosed (common misdiagnoses include epilepsy, depression, and schizophrenia).

ABOUT PROJECT SLEEP

Believing in the value of sleep, Project Sleep is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization aiming to improve public health by raising awareness of the importance of sleep health and sleep disorders. Project Sleep educates and empowers individuals using events, campaigns, and programs to bring people together and talk about sleep as a pillar of health.

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