

REM BEHAVIOR DISORDER

WHAT IS REM SLEEP BEHAVIOR DISORDER?

REM sleep behavior disorder (RBD) is a condition in which people act out their dreams, sometimes injuring themselves or their bed partners. During sleep we cycle through several stages, and most vivid dreaming happens during the REM sleep stage. During REM sleep, the brain usually keeps muscles completely relaxed (paralyzed), but in people with REM sleep behavior disorder (RBD) this process is disrupted, allowing people to act out their dreams.

There are several types of RBD. RBD can be an isolated neurological disorder, or related to another medical condition such as Parkinson's disease or dementia with Lewy bodies - this type is more common in people over 50 years old. In people less than 50 years old RBD is more commonly a side effect of medications, such as SSRI antidepressants, caused by brain lesions affecting the brain regions that control REM sleep, or associated with narcolepsy.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF REM SLEEP BEHAVIOR DISORDER?

People with RBD may look like they are acting out their dreams, including:

- Body twitches and jerks while asleep
- Vigorous movements like flailing, grabbing, kicking, punching, jumping, or leaping out of bed while they are still asleep
- Talking, shouting, swearing, or calling out while asleep
- Remembering vivid dreams that match their actions when they wake up

People with RBD can injure themselves or their bed partner and disturb their bed partner's sleep. Although it is possible for people without RBD to occasionally experience some of these symptoms, people with RBD generally have them more often and get worse over time, increasing the risk of injury.

HOW IS REM SLEEP BEHAVIOR DISORDER DIAGNOSED?

Seeing a **sleep specialist and/or neurologist** is recommended. They will ask questions about symptoms and sleep, ideally with the help of a partner or roommate who has witnessed the behavior, if available. They will also do a physical and neurological exam.

- To diagnose RBD and to check for other sleep disorders, an **overnight sleep study** (also called polysomnography) is done in a sleep center/lab. It uses video and stick-on sensors to monitor body movements, muscle tone, brain activity, breathing, and heart rate.
- If there's reason to suspect another potential sleep disorder, some specialists may also request a **multiple sleep latency test**, which measures how a person sleeps during the day after an overnight sleep study. The person is asked to nap for around 20 minutes every 2 hours.

HOW IS REM SLEEP BEHAVIOR DISORDER TREATED?

The best choice of treatments for each person with RBD depends on the type and cause of RBD, and co-existing medical conditions, and may include:

- **Bedroom safety precautions** to reduce the risk of injury, such as removing weapons from the bedroom, moving the bed away from windows, placing a large object like a dresser in front of windows, moving objects that could cause injury away from the bed like lamps, padding hard furniture, putting a soft rug by the bed, and having a barrier (e.g., pillows) between the person with RBD and their bed partner, or the bed partner sleeping in a separate bed.
- **Discussing discontinuing medication** that may be causing RBD symptoms with your doctor.
- **Treating other sleep disorders** that can make RBD symptoms worse.
- Helpful **lifestyle strategies** include keeping healthy sleep habits (also called sleep hygiene) and learning about RBD.
- **Social support**, through connecting with other people who have RBD and their families, can empower people to understand RBD and learn strategies to live well with RBD.
- **Regular monitoring for symptoms** that could be a sign of other neurological disorders, such as tremors.
- **Medications** may be prescribed for people with isolated RBD or secondary RBD due to a medical condition, including clonazepam and melatonin. Pramipexole may be helpful for people with isolated RBD. Rivastigmine can be helpful in people who also have mild cognitive impairment or Parkinson's disease.

PEOPLE WITH REM SLEEP
BEHAVIOR DISORDER NEED A
SAFE SLEEPING ENVIRONMENT.