



Narcolepsy

What is narcolepsy?

Narcolepsy can be defined as excessive drowsiness during the day with a tendency to sleep at inappropriate times. The sleep episodes of narcolepsy are sometimes brought on by highly stressful situations and are not completely relieved by any amount of sleep. The four most common symptoms of narcolepsy are:

- Excessive daytime sleepiness
- Cataplexy (sudden loss of strength in the muscles)
- Sleep paralysis (brief loss of muscle control when falling asleep or waking up)
- Hypnagogic hallucinations (vivid dreamlike experience that occur when drowsy)

How is narcolepsy treated?

Although narcolepsy cannot yet be cured, its symptoms can usually be controlled or improved so that sufferers experience symptoms less frequently and lead fairly normal lives.

Medication

- Prescription medications are available and can be effective in controlling excessive daytime sleepiness, cataplexy, hallucinations, and sleep disturbances.
- Over the counter medications containing caffeine usually do not work well in narcolepsy.
- ***Behavior Treatment***
- Follow a regular sleep/wake schedule. Go to bed and get up at approximately the same time each day.
- Take short naps once or twice a day as needed.
- Be cautious during activities that can be dangerous, such as driving or cooking; try to plan your schedule so that you will be alert during these times.
- Carefully follow the healthcare provider's instructions regarding medications.
- ***Management of the Environment***
- Educate family members. Daytime sleepiness may be mistaken for laziness, depression, or lack of ability.
- Let friends know about the disorder.
- Educate employers about the disorder. Making certain accommodations at work can help a narcolepsy sufferer continue to be a productive employee.
- Find a narcolepsy support group.
- If narcolepsy interferes with work, look into financial benefits that may be available.
- If the person suffering from narcolepsy is a child, make sure his/her teachers know about the disorder.
- ***Good Sleep Habits***
- Get up about the same time every day.
- Go to bed only when sleepy.
- Establish relaxing pre-sleep rituals (taking a warm bath, having a light bedtime snack, reading).
- Exercise regularly.
- Maintain a regular schedule.
- Avoid caffeine within six hours of bedtime and do not drink alcohol when you are tired.
- Avoid smoking close to bedtime.
- If you nap, do so at the same time each day.
- Use sleeping pills conservatively.