

QUIETING RESTLESS LEGS: A GUIDE FOR PEOPLE WITH RLS & THEIR FAMILIES

Imagine settling down in bed for a good night's sleep. Just as you start to doze off, you are awakened by restless, creepy-crawl, jittery sensations in your legs along with strong urges to move them. Often, these feelings are so powerful, so uncomfortable, and so irritating that your parent has to get up and walk around the bedroom until these unpleasant feelings finally disappear.

LEARNING ABOUT RLS

These odd sensations are symptoms of a medical condition known as "restless legs syndrome" (RLS). This disorder is usually diagnosed in people over age 50 and it affects an estimated 10% or older men and women. For many sufferers, restless legs are more annoying than painful so they don't bother to tell their doctor about their discomfort. Occasionally the condition even disappears for a time for no apparent reason only to recur a few months later

GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH RLS

One of RLS most annoying symptoms is strange twitchy feelings that can occur at almost any age. although people over 50 are most likely to suffer from RLS. The discomfort caused by restless makes it almost impossible for older sufferers (and their bed partners!) to get a good night's sleep. As a result, your parent often spends much of the day feeling cranky, groggy, or sleepy simply because he or she can't get a full night of uninterrupted sleep.

UNDERSTANDING RLS

What sets off leg restlessness is not clear and the causes of its disturbing symptoms have not yet been identified. However some medical experts believe that that a malfunctioning nervous system may be responsible for restless legs. Restless legs have also been linked to iron deficiencies, certain vitamin supplements like vitamin B12 and folic acid. Alcoholism, Parkinson's disease, diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, and kidney disorders may also be responsible for this odd disorder.

If your older relative complains about these symptoms, suggest that she make an appointment with her primary care physician for a complete physical and to check for iron or vitamin deficiencies that may be the cause of the disease.

Although there is no cure for RLS a variety of treatments and lifestyle changes are available to manage your parent's restless legs and lead a more comfortable, pleasant life. Your relative, you and her doctor can work together to develop a plan to manage his RLS symptoms with appropriate medications and home remedies to relieve RLS discomforts:

- Advil, Motrin and other over-the-counter remedies often help reduce annoying RLS symptoms.

- Fill the bathtub with warm water for your older relative to soak in. Massaging legs can help quiet hyperactive muscles.
- Sooth uncomfortable leg sensations with alternating warm packs with cool packs.
- Suggest that your older relative use relaxation techniques like yoga stretches or meditations to help her relax before bedtime.
- Make sure your parent's bedroom is quiet, dark and comfortable. Encourage him to go to bed at the same time every night. Substitute herbal tea decaffeinated tea or other caffeine-free warm drinks before bedtime.
- Ask your parent's doctor about adding dietary supplements like – iron, folic acid, vitamin B to help control restless legs.
- Encourage your older relative to stop smoking. Smoking can aggravate RLS symptoms.
- Help your relative stay active by working easy exercises into your relative's daily routine. – strolling around the block, sweeping the kitchen floor, gardening, visiting friends – are good places to start an exercise program.

LEARNING MORE ABOUT RLS

Most people know very little about Restless Legs Syndrome until a family member, friend, or relative are diagnosed with this disorder. To find out more about RLS visit The Restless Legs Foundation is a non-profit organization offering current information about restless leg syndrome for people with this disease, caregivers, families and people with the disease. Visit the site at www.rls.org.634/12-27/2010