

Health Literacy

A big issue some face is when they are diagnosed with an illness or disorder and have no idea what it means or how to care for themselves. Learn about these 8 sleep disorders and how they can affect your sleep health.

INSOMNIA

This is characterized by an ongoing difficulty to fall or remain asleep even if you want to sleep and having enough time to sleep. People with insomnia tend to experience daytime sleepiness and may have difficulty functioning while they are awake. Chronic insomnia is diagnosed when someone has these symptoms at least three times per week for at least three months.¹

FACTS TO KNOW:¹

- Up to two-thirds of adults periodically experience some form of insomnia.
- Insomnia is more likely to occur with older age, lower socioeconomic status, and anxiety or depression.
- Therapy, sleep aids, and other approaches can reduce insomnia symptoms.

RESTLESS LEG SYNDROME (RLS)

People with RLS experience tingling or crawling sensations that create an irresistible urge to move their legs. The sensations and need to move tend to get worse when sitting or lying down which makes it difficult to sleep. RLS is linked with pregnancy, Parkinson's disease, iron deficiency, and other factors. Unfortunately, the cause of most RLS cases is unknown.¹

FACTS TO KNOW:¹

- Up to 15% of people have RLS but only around 2-3% experience significant symptoms.
- RLS symptoms are not only triggered by rest, but they may also worsen with consuming caffeine and using certain medications.
- Healthy sleep habits, dietary changes, exercise, medical devices, and medications are effective treatments.

EXCESSIVE SLEEPINESS (EDS)

It's normal to feel sleepy if you didn't get a good night's rest. But excessive daytime sleepiness (EDS) is the medical term that describes extreme grogginess occurring almost every day for at least three months. EDS makes it difficult or even impossible to stay awake during the day. A wide range of medical and psychological conditions can lead to EDS, including sleep apnea, narcolepsy, hypothyroidism, chronic pain, depression, and anxiety.¹

FACTS TO KNOW:¹

- EDS is believed to occur in up to 25% of the population.
- EDS is not a sleep disorder necessarily but rather it is a symptom of many sleep disorders and other health conditions.
- To determine the cause of EDS, a doctor may suggest you do a sleep study or other tests.

NON-24-HOUR SLEEP WAKE DISORDER

For most adults, the circadian rhythms that guide the sleep-wake cycle reset about every 24 hours. This is why many people start to get sleep around the same time each night. In contrast, people with non-24-hour wake disorder have circadian rhythms that are either shorter or longer than 24 hours. People with this disorder progressively shift their sleep and wake times one to two hours earlier or later each day.¹

FACTS TO KNOW:¹

- This disorder primarily affects people who are blind and unable to see light.
- People with this condition cycle through sleeping during the day or sleeping at night for days or weeks at a time.
- This disorder is one of the six circadian sleep-wake rhythm disorders.

SLEEP APNEA

A common sleep-related breathing disorder that disrupts breathing at night. People with this condition usually snore heavily and may wake up choking or gasping for air. There are two types of sleep apnea. Obstructive sleep apnea occurs when tissues in the mouth and throat relax which blocks the upper airway. Central sleep apnea occurs when the brain temporarily stops sending signals to the muscles that control breathing.¹

FACTS TO KNOW:¹

- Obstructive sleep apnea affects at least 30 million Americans, but many cases go undiagnosed.
- People with sleep apnea often experience daytime sleepiness, fatigue, and morning headaches and dry mouth.
- Treatment options for sleep apnea include CPAP therapy, oral appliances, and in some cases, surgery.

NARCOLEPSY

A sleep disorder that makes people feel excessively tired during the day despite getting an adequate amount of sleep. This can lead to an irresistible urge to sleep which leads to "sleep attacks" that typically last for a few minutes. These sleep attacks are other symptoms of narcolepsy are caused by disruptions in the brain's ability to regulate sleep-wake cycle.¹

FACTS TO KNOW:¹

- Narcolepsy affects roughly 1 in 2000 people in the U.S.
- Sleep attacks can be accompanied by cataplexy which is a sudden loss of muscle tone that causes people to slump over as they doze off.
- People with narcolepsy are at a high risk for accident or injury, but treatment with medication and lifestyle change can also be a big help.

PARASOMNIAS

These are a group of unusual sleep behaviors that can occur before falling asleep, during sleep, or in the transition between sleep and wakefulness. This is most common in children but can affect adults as well. This could lead to sleepwalking, bed wetting, night terrors, or even exploding head syndrome.¹

FACTS TO KNOW:¹

- Parasomnias occur in up to 20% of children.
- Parasomnias are categorized based on when in a person's sleep cycle, they wake.
- Managing parasomnias typically involves maintaining the safety of the sleeper and any bed partners and promoting sufficient healthy sleep.

SHIFT WORK DISORDER

This develops in people whose jobs require them to work late at night or early in the morning. Sleeping during the day and working at night can mess up a person's daily schedule and circadian rhythms that guide their body to feel alert or sleepy in response to light or dark. People with this condition often feel excessively tired at work and struggle to get enough sleep during their rest periods.¹

FACTS TO KNOW:¹

- At least 1/3 of shift workers meet the criteria for a shift work disorder diagnosis.
- People with shift work disorder get on average 90 minutes less sleep compared with people who work day shifts.
- Treatment for shift work disorder focuses on strategies that encourage alertness while at work and quality sleep between shifts.

¹Pacheco, D. (2022). Sleep Disorders: What they are, their causes and symptoms, and how people with sleep disorders can get relief. Sleep Foundation. Retrieved from <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-disorders>

Now that you learned about the different types of sleep disorders. Test your knowledge by taking the quiz below.

QUESTION 01

Which disorder is characterized by disruption in breathing at night?

- A Narcolepsy
- B Insomnia
- C Sleep Apnea
- D Shift Work Disorder

QUESTION 02

Sleepwalking, bed wetting, night terrors, or exploding head syndrome are symptoms of which disorder?

- A Restless Leg Syndrome
- B Parasomnias
- C Excessive Sleepiness
- D Non-24-Hour Sleep Wake Disorder

QUESTION 03

People with shift work disorder on average get less than ____ minutes of sleep compared to those who do not have this disorder.

- A 90
- B 60
- C 45
- D 30

QUESTION 04

Which of these is technically a symptom and not a disorder?

- A Restless Leg Syndrome
- B Non-24-Hour Sleep Wake Disorder
- C Narcolepsy
- D Excessive Sleepiness

QUESTION 05

Parasomnia is most common in:

- A Adults over 65
- B Children
- C Men
- D Women

QUESTION 06

Non-24-Hour Sleep Wake Disorder primarily affects people who are:

- A Deaf
- B Paraplegic
- C Blind
- D All of the above

Answer key: 1)C 2)B 3)A 4)D 5)B 6)C

Got questions on other health issues related to sleep health, physical activity, tobacco, or nutrition? Send your questions to usaf.jbsa.afmsa.mbx.hpo@mail.mil. For more online health tips, visit the Air Force Health Promotion webpage <https://www.airforcemedicine.af.mil/Resources/Health-Promotion/>



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