

Date: 5/27/2008 Patient: Elizabeth Test

Date: 5/27/2008 Patient: Elizabeth Test

## **Restless Legs Syndrome (RLS)**

### **What is restless legs syndrome (RLS)?**

Restless legs syndrome (RLS) is a cause of insomnia (trouble sleeping) for many people. RLS sufferers experience aching, twitching, tingling, burning, or prickling sensations in the lower leg muscles when they lie in bed or sometimes when they are sitting down. The discomfort is relieved only by getting up and standing or walking.

### **How does it occur?**

The exact cause of RLS is not known. It tends to run in families. It is more common after middle age and occurs more frequently in women than in men. Many people with RLS can recall "growing pains" in their legs during childhood. It may be that a nerve malfunction is involved. RLS has also been linked with alcohol dependence, smoking, too much caffeine (usually from drinking coffee), rheumatoid arthritis, anemia, and diabetes. Use of some medicines may make symptoms worse.

### **What are the symptoms?**

Symptoms may include:

- aching, twitching, tingling, burning, prickling in the lower leg when you are lying down or sitting
- relief from the symptoms when you stand up or walk around.

### **How is it diagnosed?**

The diagnosis of RLS is based on your medical history. Your health care provider will examine you and may order blood tests or other tests to check for an underlying medical problem, such as anemia, rheumatoid arthritis, or diabetes.

### **How is it treated?**

Your health care provider can prescribe medicine to relieve the symptoms and allow you to sleep. Levodopa (Sinemet), a drug usually used for Parkinson's disease, is often prescribed.

For many people who have RLS, it is a great relief just to learn that there are other RLS sufferers like themselves and that they are not alone.

### **How can I take care of myself?**

- Follow your health care provider's advice for relief of your RLS symptoms.

- Stretch or massage the leg muscles before going to sleep.
- Practice relaxation methods.
- Wear long socks to bed.
- Use a hot water bottle or cold compresses on the painful area before you go to sleep.
- Take a hot bath before bedtime.
- Avoid or cut back on caffeine (coffee, tea, cocoa, cola).
- Avoid or cut back on alcohol.
- Improve your general health. Eat a healthy diet. Exercise regularly.

For more information about restless legs syndrome, visit the Restless Legs Syndrome Foundation Web site: <http://www.rls.org>.

Developed by Ann Carter, MD, for McKesson Provider Technologies.

Published by [McKesson Provider Technologies](#).

Last modified: 2006-01-11

Last reviewed: 2006-01-11

*This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.*

Copyright © 2006 McKesson Corporation and/or one of its subsidiaries. All Rights Reserved.