

Restless Legs Syndrome (RLS)

- Restless Legs Syndrome (RLS), a common and disruptive neurological condition, encompasses a range of severity that includes mild, moderate and severe symptoms, and affects approximately one in ten adults in the U.S.
- RLS is characterized by a compelling urge to move the legs and by uncomfortable or sometimes painful sensations in the legs often described as creeping-crawling, tingling, pulling or tightening.
- Symptoms of RLS generally occur at rest, such as when sitting, lying or sleeping, and are temporarily relieved by movement. These symptoms can significantly disrupt a patient's sleep and daily activities.
- Although the exact cause of primary RLS is unknown, researchers hypothesize that the underlying cause of RLS may be related to dopamine, a chemical that carries the signals between nerve cells that control body movement. When the dopamine system does not function properly, it may upset the normal communication of these signals.
- Women account for approximately two-thirds of people with RLS, although RLS occurs in both men and women. Further research is needed to understand why women may be affected disproportionately.
- RLS is generally a chronic condition, and the symptoms of RLS tend to become more troublesome as people get older, which is why most people are not diagnosed until middle-age.
- People with RLS often have difficulty falling and staying asleep and can feel tired during the day. Due to chronic sleep disruption that can be associated with the condition, people with RLS report significant impact on daily activities.
- People with RLS may also have difficulty with activities that require prolonged sitting such as movies, long car rides or airline flights.
- A genetic component has been suggested for patients with primary RLS. Clinical data demonstrate a positive family history of the disorder in as many as 50 percent of affected individuals.
- Despite the prevalence of RLS, it frequently remains under-diagnosed. A wide range of other diagnoses, including back pain, depression, arthritis, nocturnal cramps, insomnia, and neuropathy, have been given to patients who present with symptoms of RLS.
- When evaluating patients' symptoms of RLS, it is important for health care providers to rule out other underlying conditions that are associated with secondary RLS symptoms, such as iron deficiency, pregnancy and renal failure.