

# How to Manage **Restless Legs Syndrome** at Home

This guide will help you understand:

What is Restless Legs Syndrome?

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What causes Restless Legs Syndrome?

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What you can do to help manage your Restless Legs Syndrome.

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When you should talk to your healthcare team.

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**One:carepath** gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the many patients, caregivers and providers that were involved in preparing this Symptom Self-Management Guide.

## What is Restless Legs Syndrome?

Restless Legs Syndrome, also called Willis-Ekbom Disease, causes an unpleasant feeling (e.g., tingling, pins and needles, prickling, pulling, or crawling) and a strong urge to move your legs when you are resting. It usually happens in the late afternoon, evening or when you are in bed sleeping. When you sleep your legs may move or jerk. This can cause you to wake up, have an interrupted sleep and feel tired the next day.



**Tell your healthcare team if you have restless legs syndrome and are finding it difficult to manage.**

## What causes Restless Legs Syndrome?

Often there isn't a clear reason why people get restless legs syndrome. It can run in families and happens to people who are living with a chronic condition or taking certain medications.

## What you can do to help manage your Restless Legs Syndrome.

Managing restless leg syndrome works best when you play an active role.

- Try to figure out if there is a cause for your restless leg syndrome,
- Is it better or worse at different times?
- What helps or makes it worse?
- You may want to use a symptom diary to record information about your restless leg syndrome. Tracking this information will help you talk to healthcare team about your restless leg syndrome.

### Physical steps you can try:

- **Medication:** If you take medication for your restless legs, take it as prescribed so your symptom doesn't get too bad.
- **Gentle exercise:** If it is safe for you, do gentle exercises like walking, swimming, and riding a stationary bike every day.
- **Daily Stretching:** Stay flexible by stretching every day.
- **Leg Massage:** A gentle leg massage sometimes helps.
- **Heat or cold:** Applying heat or ices packs to the area may help. Be careful if you have nerve damage from diabetes.
- **Create a sleep routine:** Go to bed and get up the next day at the same time every day. Try not to nap in the afternoon or evening.
- **Don't try and force sleep:** If you can't fall asleep within 20 minutes, get up and do something you find relaxing in a dimmed

light. Get back into bed when you feel sleepy.

- **Create a sleep-friendly bedroom:** Use your bedroom for sleep (and sex) only. Keep your bedroom cool, quiet and comfortable.
- **Avoid:** Using mobile phones, tablets or computers in bed. Also avoid watching TV 60-90 minutes before bed. The light from these can affect the hormones that make you feel sleepy.
- **Limit or stop:** Alcohol, caffeine and nicotine to see if your symptoms get better. These can make your restless legs worse.

### Mental activities you can try:

- **Think positively:** Positive thinking may ease restless legs.
- **Distract yourself:** Do something that you enjoy to try and keep yourself mentally busy. For example, crossword puzzles, Sudoku, needlework, or video games.
- **Relax:** Try meditation, mindfulness, or relaxation therapy. Learning to relax and to change the way you think may help you cope with restless legs.

### Relaxation techniques you can try at home.

Ask if someone on your healthcare team can help you get started. You can also learn some on your own. Some techniques include:

- **Progressive muscle relaxation:** Focus on slowly tensing and then relaxing each muscle group.
- **Deep breathing exercises:** Slow your breathing to the point where you are as relaxed in your breathing as possible. Breaths should be deep and fill your lungs.
- **Meditation:** Sit or lie in a comfortable position for 20 minutes. Be aware of your breathing, your sensations (including your pain), your thoughts, and feelings.

- **Guided Imagery:** Form mental images to take a visual journey to a peaceful, calming place or situation.
- **Yoga:** Can relax your breathing, ease muscle tension, and energize your mind and body.
- **Massage:** Helps reduce all over muscle tension and pain, which can help you relax.
- **Hydrotherapy:** It uses flowing water to relax muscles.
- **Music and art therapy:** Listening, playing music, drawing and painting can help you to relax.

## When you should talk to your healthcare team.

Speak with your healthcare team if restless legs syndrome is a problem for you. Your worries and questions are important to you and them. Your healthcare team may speak to you about the different medications you can take.

- Let them know if you think your medical condition or medications are the reason for your restless legs.
- Let your healthcare team know if a medication is working for you or if you're having side effects. There are different types of medications that can help restless legs syndrome, you may have to try a few different ones to know what works for you.
- Talk to them before taking over-the-counter medication, including vitamins and herbal remedies.

## Tips on sharing your symptoms with your healthcare team:

Make some notes about your restless legs symptoms and tell your healthcare team about them.

- Has there been a change in your restless legs syndrome?
- What does your restless legs feel like? How bad is it?
- When does it happen and how long does it last?
- What makes it better or worse? What have you tried already?
- Make a list of all the medications you are taking including over the counter medications.

## Notes:

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