



# RESTLESS LEGS SYNDROME FACT SHEET

## *How to know if you have RLS and what to do if you do*

### **What is RLS?**

RLS (restless legs syndrome) is a disruptive neurologic disorder that affects up to 10% of the population. RLS results in an irresistible urge to move the legs which is often accompanied by unusual or unpleasant sensations in the legs that may be described as *creeping*, *tugging*, or *pulling*. Because RLS most often occurs in the evening, it can severely disrupt sleep and reduce quality of life.

### **How do I know if I have RLS?**

In order for you to be correctly diagnosed with RLS, you must meet the criteria described in the four bullet points below:

- You have a strong urge to move your legs which you can't really resist.
- Your RLS symptoms start or become worse when you are resting.
- Your RLS symptoms get better when you move your legs. Relief persists as long as the movement continues.
- Your RLS symptoms are worse in the evening especially when you are resting.

### **What causes RLS?**

Research into the cause of RLS is ongoing and answers are limited. Researchers believe that RLS is likely to have different causes that may overlap. We do know that while RLS often runs in families, it also sometimes appears as the result of another condition. A substantial number of women develop RLS during pregnancy. In addition, anemia, low iron levels, end-stage renal disease with dialysis, and peripheral neuropathy are all associated with RLS. Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) may also be associated with RLS.

### **What if I think I have RLS?**

If you think you have RLS, it is important that you schedule an appointment with your physician. Your doctor will review your medical history, complete a thorough physical exam, listen to a description of your symptoms, complete a diagnostic interview, and rule out conditions that may be confused with RLS. In addition, your doctor may check your iron levels or ask you to stay overnight in a sleep lab. Unfortunately, there are no lab tests to determine if you have RLS.

## What treatments are available?

While there is currently no cure for RLS, there are many nonpharmaceutical and pharmaceutical therapies that help ease RLS symptoms. In addition to the four common drug classes that offer help for RLS, (dopaminergic agents, sedatives, anticonvulsants, and pain relievers), there are other avenues available. You and your doctor can:

- check for a vitamin or iron deficiency.
- look at medications that could be making your RLS worse.
- find an exercise schedule and physical activities that help you deal with RLS.
- find activities to keep your mind engaged when RLS presents itself.
- discuss eliminating alcohol and caffeine from your diet.
- look at your diet to assure it is healthy and balanced.
- identify habits and activities that worsen your RLS symptoms.
- implement a program of good sleep habits.

## How do I live with RLS?

Living with RLS involves finding coping strategies that work for you. Here are some of our favorites:

- *Talk about RLS.* Share information with family and friends.
- *Don't fight it.* Don't suppress the urge to move. Get out of bed and find an activity to get your mind off RLS.
- *Keep a sleep diary.* Keep track of your medications and strategies and discuss these with your physician. Dictate into a tape recorder if you can't sit still to write. You can also record daily activities like diet, exercise, etc.
- *Occupy your mind.* Find an activity you enjoy to keep your mind engaged and help you through troublesome times.
- *Rise to new levels.* Elevate your desktop or bookstand to a height that will allow you to stand as you work or read.
- *Stretch out your day.* Begin and end each day with stretching or gentle massage.
- *Help others.* Consider joining a support group. There are over 100 groups located throughout the United States and Canada.

*The Restless Legs Syndrome Foundation is dedicated to improving the lives of the men, women, and children who live with this often devastating disease. The organization's goals are to increase awareness of restless legs syndrome (RLS), to improve treatments, and, through research, to find a cure.*

*This publication has been reviewed and approved by our Medical Advisory Board. Literature distributed by the Restless Legs Syndrome Foundation, including this brochure, is offered for information purposes only and should not be considered a substitute for the advice of a healthcare provider. The Restless Legs Syndrome Foundation does not endorse or sponsor any products or services.*

### **What is the RLS Foundation?**

The Restless Legs Syndrome Foundation is a nonprofit organization which provides the latest information about RLS. The three goals of the Foundation are to increase awareness, to improve treatments, and, through research, to find a cure.

### **Where can I get more info?**

You can contact the RLS Foundation toll-free at 877-463-6757 or email us at [rlsfoundation@rls.org](mailto:rlsfoundation@rls.org). We also have a website! At [www.rls.org](http://www.rls.org) you'll find information about support groups, publications about RLS, our searchable healthcare provider directory, current research on RLS, our Online Community, past issues of *NightWalkers* (our quarterly newsletter), and much more.

### **How can I find a support group?**

All over the country, people are coming together to share their feelings about living with RLS. You can find a list of support groups on our website. There is also a list in each issue of *NightWalkers*.

### **How can I find a doctor?**

The RLS Foundation does not have any physicians on staff. However our website ([www.rls.org](http://www.rls.org)) features an extensive directory of healthcare providers who have expressed interest in taking new patients.

### **How do I become a member?**

For \$25 a year (\$30 in Canada and \$40 internationally) you can become a member of the RLS Foundation which entitles you to a wide assortment of benefits including free shipping on RLS-related publications, a subscription to our newsletter, a copy of our *Medical Bulletin* to share with your physician, a medical information card to carry in your wallet, and chart stickers for your medical records. Your membership supports the Foundation's goals to increase awareness, improve treatments, and, through research, find a cure.

The RLS Foundation now offers a Healthcare Provider Membership. For \$75 a year (\$100 in Canada and \$125 internationally), providers receive two issues of *The RLS Scientific Bulletin*, quarterly email updates, publications for display in their office, PowerPoint presentations on RLS, access to a secure discussion board, and many other benefits. Patients may also provide a gift membership for their doctor.

### **What can I do to help?**

The work of the Foundation is supported by individuals like you. Your tax-deductible gift\* in any amount will help distribute information about RLS and help fund vital research. You can also become a member of the RLS Foundation which not only entitles you to a long list of benefits but also helps the Foundation meet its goals.

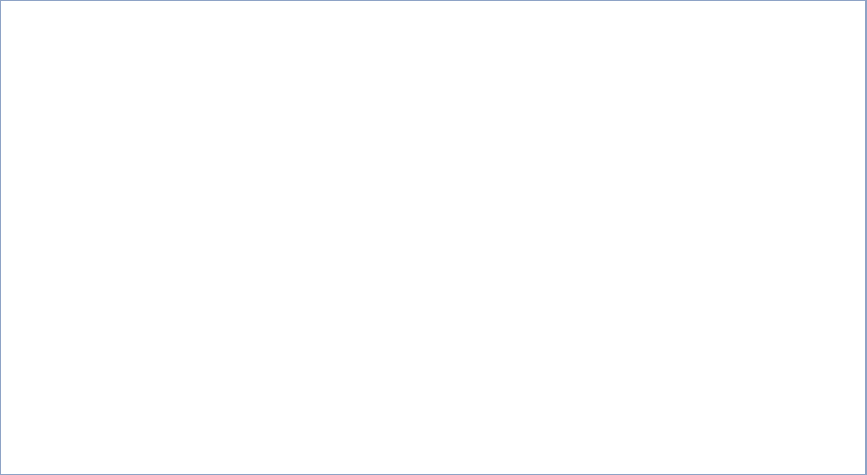
**Visit us at [www.rls.org](http://www.rls.org) today!**

\* Donations are tax deductible in the U.S. and Canada.

# Remember you are not alone!

Up to 10% of the population is living with RLS. Contact the RLS Foundation or your local support group for more information about how you can find help in dealing with RLS or how you can make a difference for others living with restless legs syndrome.

For more information, contact:



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