

TITLE 1: “Ask the Doctors”

TITLE 2:

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KEYWORDS:

- Symptoms

ABSTRACT OVERVIEW: One reader asks a question about whether cramping that is not relieved by walking is related to her RLS symptoms.

COPY OF ARTICLE:

Q. *After having had RLS for a long time, I have developed hard, tense, painful legs, with cramping. Standing or walking is now painful because of these new symptoms, which are relieved by massage and hot tub soaks. My brother, who also has RLS, now wakes during the night or early morning with severe, painful cramps in his feet, calves, and thighs; these cramps are not relieved by walking. What might cause these new symptoms? Are they caused by RLS? How should I manage them?*



A. There are many causes of leg pain, cramps, or both pain and cramps — RLS is one cause. When RLS causes leg pain or cramps, these symptoms have the usual distinguishing characteristics of RLS: they are worse at the end of the day, they are worse at rest, and they are relieved temporarily by leg activity. A history of leg pain or cramps that are associated with standing or walking is not typical of RLS and instead suggests some other cause. Leg pain with walking, in particular, raises concerns of either decreased blood supply to the legs (arterial narrowing, resulting in intermittent claudication) or a problem related to pinched nerves in the lower back (lumbar spinal stenosis, producing “pseudoclaudication”). The complaint of waking with severe leg cramps that are unrelieved by walking is uncharacteristic of RLS, the symptoms of which usually subside with walking. One potential source of nocturnal leg cramps that are unrelieved by walking is low serum potassium levels caused by use of a diuretic medication (usually used to treat heart problems or high blood pressure). Individuals who experience leg pain or cramps should undergo a medical evaluation by their primary physician.

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