

TITLE 1: "Ask the Doctor"

TITLE 2:

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- Awareness

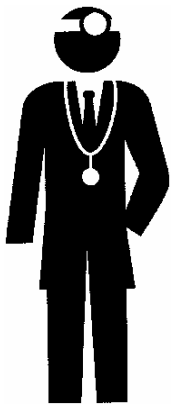
ABSTRACT OVERVIEW: A reader asks about why walking helps ease RLS symptoms.

COPY OF ARTICLE:

Ask the Doctor

Q. *After being awakened at night by RLS symptoms, a ten-minute walk downstairs is enough to relieve the discomfort. Usually, I can then go back to sleep. What happened during the walk to provide relief? It is in the muscles, the nervous system, my circulation, or some combination?*

A. Relief of RLS symptoms after walking is a common phenomenon. Several things happen during walking. The muscles in the legs, including the muscle spindles (special receptors in the muscles to communicate with the spinal cord) become active. There is sensory-motor integration, of course, there is improved circulation in the legs. Muscles act as intravenous pumps, improving the venous circulation also. As a result of increased activity in the neuromuscular and circulatory systems, impulses are transmitted to the central nervous system (brain and spinal cord) that, using some as-yet-unknown mechanisms, inhibit the uncomfortable sensation in the legs temporarily. In addition, on awakening and walking, you experience increased mental alertness and activity. We know that increased mental concentration by itself will also improve RLS symptoms. Therefore, the mechanism of relief of RLS symptoms after awakening and walking most likely results from a combination of factors. We are all trying to uncover the underlying pathogenic mechanism so that we can find a cure for this very uncomfortable and disabling condition.



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