

TITLE 1: “Ask the Doctors”

TITLE 2:

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ABSTRACT OVERVIEW: A question from a reader about whether shivering feelings in the muscles of the thighs can be related to RLS.

COPY OF ARTICLE:

Q. *After a lifetime of having RLS, I am now 80 years old and have developed a shivering feeling in the muscles of my thighs when I stand and weakness in my legs. Is this new symptom related to RLS? What might it be? How can I manage it?*

A. Shivering and weakness of the thighs are not typically symptoms of RLS. As you know, the major symptoms of RLS are sensory—an abnormal unpleasant feeling—often combined with a component of motor restlessness. If the shivering feeling is a part of RLS, then treatments that are effective for your RLS should help the shivering, even though it is happening during the day, when you are standing up. Under the direction of your physician, you might undertake a trial of medication in combination with an evaluation for other potential causes. However, it seems unlikely that these symptoms are due to RLS. Although a shivering feeling might be RLS, this feeling should be briefly alleviated if you move or stand up. In addition, weakness does not occur as a result of RLS alone. Although an elderly person with RLS might have a feeling of weakness or general fatigue, true weakness is not the result of RLS. True weakness is that which, for example, might prevent a person from climbing stairs or getting up from a chair.



The legs and trunk of our bodies are supported when standing by large muscles of the low back, buttocks, and anterior thighs. When these muscles are weak from any reason, they might quiver when they are used. Weakness of these muscles can result from a variety of causes, and a physician should evaluate such weakness. Lumbar spine disease such as spinal stenosis can impede neurologic output to the muscles and can result in weakness. Also, disorders of the muscles themselves, such as myopathy (or myositis) can produce weakness in these muscles. Steroids such as prednisone can cause myopathy. Even not using the muscles for a period of time, such as when recovering from an operation, can cause weakness. Weakness of these muscles can obviously be debilitating and even disabling, so you should be evaluated by a physician. Many, but not all, of the causes are treatable, and the weakness might improve.

It is interesting to speculate about whether a condition that could cause or contribute to restless legs could also cause weakness. Such a condition might be lumbar spine disease, producing lumbar radiculopathy or spinal stenosis and RLS. Another condition could be diabetes, producing neuropathy and RLS, now complicated by lumbar radiculitis (diabetic amyotrophy). Such ideas are best considered by your evaluating physician. Besides weakness, shaking of the large muscles of the thighs could be a tremor. One type of tremor that is similar to what you are describing is called orthostatic tremor, which is rare. Sometimes it has been called “shaky leg syndrome.” This condition is one in which certain muscles begin to oscillate rhythmically (tremor) when the person is standing but not lying (orthostatic). Often, the person

with orthostatic tremor feels unsteady, has to hang on, and has a fear of falling. The major symptom is that of shaking in the lower trunk and upper legs when the patient stands, especially if standing still, such as in the grocery-store line. Taking a step usually helps stop the tremor. Falls and injuries are rare and there is no weakness. Lying or sitting promptly relieves the tremor. This movement disorder is thought to involve rhythmic, rapid (14-18 Hz) contractions of hip flexors. Medications are available that are sometimes helpful, including clonazepam and valproate.

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