

TITLE 1: “Ask the Doctor”

TITLE 2:

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KEYWORDS:

- Non-pharmaceutical treatment

ABSTRACT OVERVIEW: A question from a reader in regards to sexual orgasm and RLS symptoms. Are the same nerves involved in RLS and sexual orgasm?

COPY OF ARTICLE:

Q. *It seems to me that the onset of each “spasm” in my legs – usually starting in my feet and ankles and progressing upward in the leg – is very similar to the feeling that occurs during a sexual orgasm. That of course starts in the groin area and then moves down into the legs, but the urge to move the legs seems to be the same. Could the same nerves be involved in RLS and sexual orgasm and could the same area of the brain trigger them?*



A. Since the cause of RLS is still unknown, it would be pure speculation to say which nerves might be involved. There is an article (Bucher SF, Seelos KC, Oertel WH, Reiser M, Trenkwalder C. Cerebral generators involve in the pathogenesis of the restless legs syndrome. *Ann Neurol* 1997; 41:639-645) that used high-resolution functional magnetic resonance imaging and found indications that cerebellar and thalamic activation may be generating the sensory leg discomfort of RLS. The area of the brain associated with sexual orgasm is different than the areas noted above to be associated with RLS. While that is not definitive evidence that the area of the brain involved in sexual orgasm is not involved in RLS, there is no known documentation that it has a role in RLS.

What is interesting is that I have heard from several RLS patients (mostly women) that having an orgasm completely relieves their RLS symptoms and thus permits them to fall asleep. This might seem like direct evidence that there may be a link between the two responses, but it is more likely that this is similar to what happens when you hit your thumb with a hammer and shake your hand to relieve the pain – the sensory input from one sensation somehow obliterates the painful one.

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