

TITLE 1: “Ask the Doctor”

TITLE 2:

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- Sleep
- Symptoms

ABSTRACT OVERVIEW: One reader asks the doctor about the differences between Tourette’s and RLS.

COPY OF ARTICLE:

Ask the Doctor

Q. *I found your website after browsing a different website that focuses on sleep disorders. I don’t have any trouble sleeping now, but have in the past. My question is this: How could someone tell the difference in his body between the symptoms of Tourette’s syndrome and restless legs*



syndrome? I was diagnosed with the former as a child, and I have first-hand experience with what TS symptoms are like. However, when I read the description of restless legs on your website, it struck me how closely those symptoms resemble what I experience with Tourette’s:

- *“RLS symptoms involve a strong urge to move the legs that may become irresistible...these sensations include creeping, itching, pulling, creepy-crawly or tugging. When the uncomfortable sensations occur they are linked to the urge to move the leg, but many patients do not report any sensation aside from the need to move the leg.” This sentence would accurately describe the symptoms of Tourette’s syndrome in my own experience.*
- *“ The RLS symptoms start or become worse when the afflicted individual is at rest. The longer the period of rest the more likely the symptoms will occur and the more severe they will become.” I have noticed in my own experience that when my mind is idle, I find my Tourette’s symptoms harder to control, but when I am physically active, or engaged in a mental activity that demands a focus of attention, the TS virtually disappears.*
- *“The RLS symptoms are reduced by any movement of the affected extremities. This relief can be complete or only partial, generally starts immediately or soon after the onset of activity and persists as long as the motor activity continues.” This description fits my experience of Tourette’s perfectly.*
- *“The RLS symptoms are worse in the evening and at night, especially when the individual lies down. (Sitting or lying down in the morning does not produce RLS symptoms as severe as those with sitting or lying down at night.)” This is the one part of RLS that doesn’t completely fit my experience of Tourette’s syndrome. While my Tourette’s symptoms are typically worse at night, I have had no problem falling asleep in the past couple of years. The Tourette’s almost always subsides at bedtime. In years past, I have had significant trouble falling asleep at night, but not because of Tourette’s. To this day I rise in the morning drowsy, and it takes me at least an hour after rising for me to feel fully awake. This problem*

leads me to wonder whether having Tourette's may have masked restless legs symptoms in my body, since the experience of them is apparently so similar. Could you suggest how I might distinguish the experience of Tourette's symptoms with the experience of restless legs symptoms? And could my difficulty in rising in the morning be a result of restless legs?

A. I cannot be sure from your description whether or not RLS is present, but the lack of a clear a.m./p.m. difference in symptoms, now or at any time in the past, would argue strongly against RLS. Another test that would help in both ruling out a diagnosis of RLS and perhaps with ruling in the correct insomnia diagnosis, is a PSG (polysomnogram, or sleep study). If the PSG reveals no signs of periodic leg movements, that would be another major strike against the RLS diagnosis. More importantly, the PSG should help define the type of insomnia you have and possibly point to the correct treatment. In any case, the results of that test (if carefully done) would allow you to combine the tallied results with your own story of symptoms, take them to any sleep specialist who is willing to review such data, and get at least a tentative sleep diagnosis.

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