



# Suggested Coping Methods for Restless Legs Syndrome

A Guide To Help You Control and Manage Your RLS

Restless legs syndrome (RLS) is a sensorimotor condition that can interfere with sleep as well as rest-related waking activities. Various treatments can help control RLS symptoms, but as yet there is no cure. Learning methods to cope with your RLS symptoms can significantly improve your quality of life. If your RLS symptoms change due to trying a new coping method, be sure to talk with your doctor.

The information presented here has been compiled from tips and suggestions offered by members and volunteers of the RLS Foundation. The content of this document is offered for informational purposes only. Any products mentioned are not endorsed by the RLS Foundation. We are grateful for having received an overwhelming number of coping strategies and have detailed the most common ones below.

## *General Coping Activities*

A consistent bedtime routine is extremely important for the management of RLS. Learn what works best for you and remain consistent with your routine each night to find what offers you the most relief.

**Keep your mind engaged.** An activity that stimulates the brain can help significantly in controlling your RLS. Challenge yourself to word puzzles, reading, knitting, playing an instrument, writing, or engaging in a stimulating conversation to divert yourself. Try these activities while standing or walking if symptoms persist.

**Change the temperature.** Some members of the RLS community find temporary relief from a hot bath. Others say a cold shower is soothing. Ice packs and heating pads have also been used for relief. Determining what helps you is important.

**Exercise.** Those with RLS may find significant temporary relief by engaging in light to moderate aerobic exercises such as: jogging, stretching, walking, lifting weights, isometric leg lifts, engaging in romantic intimacy, ankle

circles, or other activities. Exercising muscles anytime of the day may help reduce nighttime restlessness.

Remember, too much or very vigorous exercise at any time or stimulation just before bed can work against you – when using exercise, try to find the amount that helps you best.

**Over-the-counter creams.** One form of coping involves applying topical creams before bed. Rubs, gels, and creams that can be obtained over the counter have been said by some to alleviate RLS symptoms temporarily. There is no specific item to which everyone points, so this is a trial and error process where outcome is unique to each person.

**Massage.** There is some debate about the effects of massage on RLS symptoms. Nevertheless, it is frequently mentioned as a coping method and tends to be most effective just before bedtime.

**Apply pressure.** Some people with RLS have recommended compressing the legs. Suggestions included everything from a heavy blanket draped over one's legs to using bandages or other compressing devices to wrap legs. Wrapping legs is a common coping method used for sleeping with one's spouse. Be mindful not to damage tissue when applying pressure. (Some RLS patients cannot tolerate any contact with the bed sheets and may create a tent around their legs.)

**Stay active.** Try watching television from a rocking chair or yoga ball to keep active. Try walking, pacing, or jogging in place when engaging in sedentary activities.

**Avoid symptom triggers.** Avoid food and beverages (such as those which contain caffeine or alcohol) and medications that can cause your RLS symptoms to worsen.

**Educate.** One way to cope with RLS is to educate those around you. Explain your symptoms to your spouse, boss, friends, service personnel, or even strangers. By educating others, they may be more understanding and helpful as you engage in coping practices.

**Research conducted recently on RLS brains has shown they tend to have low iron stores. This may also help explain the variations in symptoms from mild to severe among those with RLS and why symptoms may vary in one person over time.**

### *Coping Methods for Travel*

Traveling is often hard for people with RLS. Try to maintain your bedtime routine even when traveling.

**Pre-travel practices.** Try stretching, walking, or standing before you begin your travels. Be strict about avoiding RLS triggers before travelling. When packing, include plenty of activities to keep your mind engaged. Be sure to have your medications or things you use for relief (such as a cold/hot press) with you.

**Time of travel.** It's been suggested to book early flights, especially when a trip is overseas or involves a time zone change. Traveling early in the day, before symptoms tend to strike, will make the flight easier.

**Have room to move.** On a plane, train or bus, make arrangements for special seating if available (such as an emergency exit seat). Talk with staff or attendants about your need to get up and move from time to time or have your doctor write a note so that you can get an aisle seat or even a bulkhead seat. When driving, plan ahead to make stops every few hours.

**Snack.** Many of those living with RLS find bringing a small snack food such as popcorn, raisins, or cereal can help with travel. By eating one piece at a time the mind remains engaged and travel may become a bit easier.

### *Coping while at Work*

Remember there is hope for a more RLS-friendly work environment if you tell co-workers about RLS and ask for understanding and help. A note from your doctor or a medical alert card can help explain your RLS to superiors.

**Request a sit/stand workstation.** Today there are a variety of desks available. Consider asking for a standing or flexible workstation to reduce the number of hours spent sitting. If this is unavailable to you, try changing your seat height often to keep legs from remaining in one position for too long.

**Work the nightshift.** Most peoples' lives do not allow for a complete schedule upheaval, but some individuals with RLS have gone so far as to work during the night. By keeping active all night, they find relief from RLS symptoms during the day. Night work can have unintended consequences; discuss it with your health care provider before trying it.

**Stay on your feet.** Whether on the phone, in a meeting or working a labor intensive job, increasing the time spent on your feet can help alleviate RLS symptoms during the day.

**Let coworkers know.** By being open to others at work concerning your RLS, you help them become more supportive of your suggested work-related changes.

### *Summary*

Managing RLS is a personal process. If your symptoms have changed due to a new coping method, do not delay in calling your doctor. Learning to live with your RLS symptoms is a journey. But you are not alone in this journey. You are joined by thousands of others who are seeking new ways to cope with their RLS.

### *What works for you?*

Please visit [www.rls.org](http://www.rls.org) and post your RLS coping methods on our discussion board or on our facebook page. Don't have access to the internet? Write to our *NightWalkers* editor for consideration in our Bedtime Stories section.



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*The Restless Legs Syndrome Foundation is dedicated to improving the lives of the men, women, and children who live with this often devastating disease. The organization's goals are to increase awareness of restless legs syndrome (RLS), to improve treatments, and, through research, to find a cure.*