

## REM Behavior Disorder

**REM Behavior Disorder** – This is a condition characterized by physical actions during sleep such as walking, shouting, hitting, kicking or thrashing which can lead to injury. It occurs during dreaming (REM sleep) and is associated with a violent, threatening or physically active dream.

**Description** - During sleep we experience REM sleep five or more times a night. It occurs every 90 minutes on average. If a person is awakened during REM sleep, they relate that they almost always had been dreaming.

Our brain waves during sleep are of two major types: non-REM (80%) and REM (20%) sleep. During non-REM sleep brain waves slow, eyes move slowly if at all, and our muscles relax but remain active. During normal REM Sleep there are distinct physiologic changes. Paradoxically, during REM Sleep our brain waves appear awake, eyes move rapidly, and muscle tone drops. In fact, the muscles are paralyzed. The only muscles functioning are the heart and diaphragm. A change in our brain disconnects it from our muscles. In REM sleep, dreams occur but there is no bodily movement because the muscles are paralyzed.

Conversely in REM Behavior Disorder, dreams occur but something goes wrong with the mechanism that disconnects the brain from our muscles. A dream occurs and it is acted out.

**Problems** - A person with REM Behavior Disorder will often injure themselves. Cuts, bruises, and even broken bones are not uncommon. They will likely injure those who sleep with them.

Individuals who develop REM Behavior Disorder later in life have a significant possibility (>50%) of developing Parkinson's disease or a similar disorder in the decade following diagnosis.

**Causes-**

- Medications – Predominately antidepressants
- Lifelong beginning in adolescents - unknown cause
- Other sleep disorders – Such as Sleep Apnea
- Secondary to Parkinson's (First sign preceding onset of Parkinson's)
- Secondary to other neurologic disorders

**Diagnosis** - A history of acting out disturbing, violent and threatening dreams is adequate to establish the diagnosis.

A sleep test (polysomnogram) is required to exclude other possible causative or complicating factors. Unfortunately, most insurances do not reimburse for testing.

Neurological testing is reserved for those with other symptoms

**Treatment - Goals – Prevent episodes.**

- Medications are used to control episodes
- Treatment of other medical conditions or sleep disorders

# Sleep Inspirations