


RESTLESS LEGS SYNDROME AND PERIODIC LIMB MOVEMENTS IN SLEEP

What are RLS and PLMS?

Restless Legs Syndrome (RLS) is a sensory-motor neurological disorder that causes an irresistible urge to move the legs. It often begins at a very young age but is mostly diagnosed in the middle or later years.

When an involuntary twitching or jerking of the legs occurs during sleep, it is known as Periodic Limb Movements in Sleep (PLMS).

A young woman with long, dark hair is smiling and looking upwards and to the right. She is holding a white coffee cup with a black lid. She is wearing a white, ribbed, off-the-shoulder top. The background is a bright, out-of-focus outdoor setting with sunlight filtering through trees.

The prevalence of RLS in the U.S and Europe is quoted to be around seven to 10 percent, whereas in Asia, it is reported to be around one to four percent. A local study done in Singapore showed a RLS prevalence of less than one percent. It is more common in women.

80 percent of RLS patients have PLMS. PLMS is usually picked up incidentally on overnight sleep studies. It is only clinically significant if it causes symptoms.

Restless legs syndrome begins at a very young age but is mostly diagnosed in middle or later years.

COMPLICATIONS

RLS can affect your quality of life.

Both RLS and PLMS can disturb sleep by causing sleep initiation insomnia and sleep maintenance insomnia respectively.

CAUSES

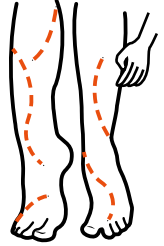
In the majority of cases, the underlying cause is unknown. Iron metabolism and dopamine, a neurochemical in the brain, are believed to play a role in causing RLS/PLMS.

RLS are often seen in patients with low iron levels, kidney failure, diabetes mellitus and low thyroid hormone.

About one in five pregnant women suffer from RLS in the last three months of pregnancy. The symptoms usually disappear after delivery. Some medications, for example, antidepressants, can trigger and worsen RLS/PLMS.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

1 The patients often describe an unpleasant crawling or creeping sensation in the feet, calves and thighs. Occasionally, the arms can be affected.



2 The symptoms are worse in the evening or at night.

3 The symptoms are relieved by moving the legs.



4 The symptoms are worse at rest.



The symptoms of Restless Legs Syndrome (RLS) are worse in the evening or at night.

DIAGNOSIS

The diagnosis of RLS lies entirely on clinical features. An overnight sleep study is occasionally used to diagnose PLMS.

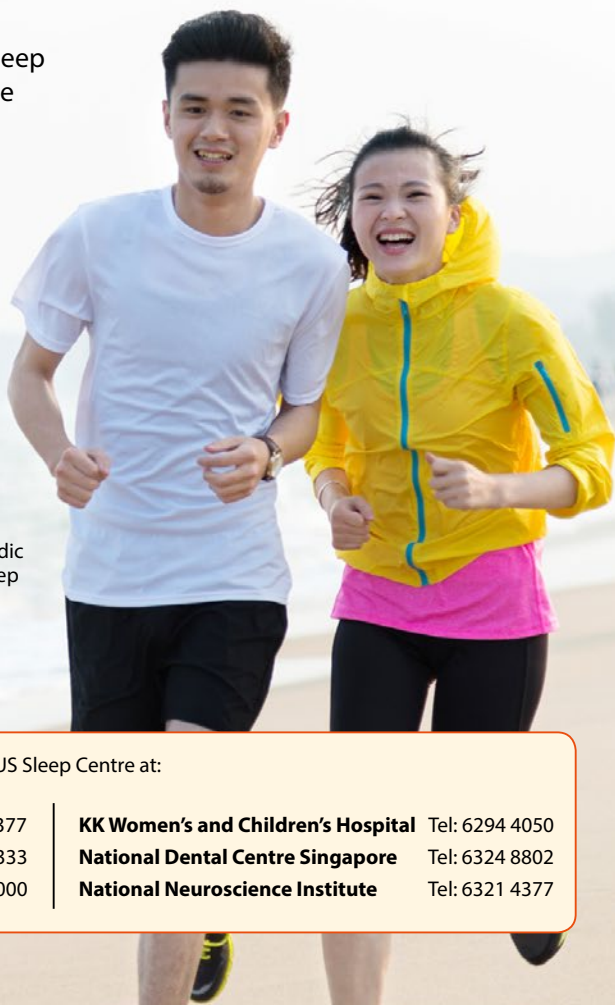
TREATMENT

First, to treat the underlying cause, if any. This includes stopping any medications that can trigger RLS/PLMS, if possible.

It is important to maintain good sleep hygiene, quit smoking and exercise regularly during the day.

The drug treatment includes: dopamine agonists, alfa-2 delta ligands (gabapentin, pregabalin) and opioids.

To manage restless legs syndrome and periodic limb movements in sleep, maintain good sleep hygiene, quit smoking and exercise regularly during the day.



For enquiries, contact SingHealth Duke-NUS Sleep Centre at:

Singapore General Hospital Tel: 6321 4377

Changi General Hospital Tel: 6850 3333

Sengkang General Hospital Tel: 6930 6000

KK Women's and Children's Hospital Tel: 6294 4050

National Dental Centre Singapore Tel: 6324 8802

National Neuroscience Institute Tel: 6321 4377