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## Narcolepsy – What Is It And How Can It Be Treated?

By Mike Mansell

What is Narcolepsy?

Narcolepsy is a chronic Neurological Disorder which is caused by the brains inability to regulate sleep cycles. At various times during the day, the patient can fall asleep at any time for anything from a few seconds up to a few minutes. The patient has little or no control over falling asleep and it can happen at the most inconvenient and embarrassing times for example, whilst driving, during a meeting or conversation or even during sex.

While Narcolepsy isn't very common, it still affects a lot of people. In the USA for example, Narcolepsy affects 25 in every 100,000 people in the population. Narcolepsy normally manifests itself in the patient's teens to early twenties. However, Narcolepsy can start in both the very young and the old. There is a body of opinion that Narcolepsy is a life-time condition however, that opinion is quite controversial at this time.

There are three main ways that Narcolepsy manifests itself. They are as follows

### Excessive Daytime Sleepiness

This is where the patient feels incredibly sleepy during the day. This is the most common narcoleptic condition by far and the one which most people associate with Narcolepsy.

### Cataplexy

Here there is a sudden loss of muscle tone with little or no warning. It is commonly a secondary symptom of Narcolepsy although it can occur albeit very rarely with other conditions. In severe cases, all the voluntary muscles can collapse with little or no warning. In mild cases, it is just a small set of the voluntary muscles. The episodes can last for anything up to 30 minutes with the patient being fully aware of what is happening, but unable to do anything about it. In some cases, especially when the cataplexy carries on for a long time, the patient can start to hallucinate.

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Cataplexy is thought to be brought on during times of extra emotional states. These states can be either good states, brought on by the patient being very happy, or from a bad state where the patient is either stressed or upset.

Wild hallucinations

Can occur during the onset of sleep and during waking.

Sleep Paralysis

This can occur at the beginning and end of sleep. It was first described in the 19th Century. The patient feels very afraid and can't move. The feeling is described commonly as if some person or creature is sitting on them holding them down.

What causes Narcolepsy?

There is a great deal of debate with regards to what causes Narcolepsy. At this time, there isn't a definitive answer.

What is generally believed though is that the brains normal pattern during sleep is that during the first hour, the brains electrical activity reduces. After this hour, the electrical activity starts to increase again. This is accompanied by rapid eye movements (REM) and deep relaxation of your muscles. After a while, the brain electrical activity starts to slow down again. This cycle repeats itself a number of times throughout sleep.

Some investigation has shown that a person suffering from Narcolepsy doesn't follow this same pattern, or rather; the initial slowing of the brains electrical activity is a lot quicker than in a non-narcoleptic.

This sleep cycle is controlled by neurones within the brain. For narcoleptics, it has been noted that the hormone Hypocretin is a lot lower than in people who don't suffer from Narcolepsy. Hypocretin it is believed controls the neurones which in turn control the brains activity during sleep.

As mentioned earlier, this is widely accepted however, there are still many questions which haven't been answered as to the cause of Narcolepsy.

What is the treatment for Narcolepsy?

As we're not exactly sure what causes Narcolepsy, there are a few treatments which have proven to be effective.

Clinical trials have shown that short day time naps can help to reduce the excessive daytime sleepiness. What is also important is that the sufferer of Narcolepsy, has a strict bedtime regime. This is so that the patient gets the recommended daily amount of sleep that is required.

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With regards to the drugs which may help, Excessive Daytime Sleepiness is helped by taking Amphetamine Stimulants. However, it must be remembered that these types of drugs do have some quite severe side effects which may in some cases cause more suffering and possibly damage than the Narcolepsy itself.

For the patients who suffer from Cataplexy, it has been found that a number of anti-depressant drugs can help to relieve the sufferer. Again, there can be side effects to these drugs.

Narcolepsy can be quite a problem for a number of people, for others, it is merely inconvenient and a bit embarrassing at times. Unfortunately, we don't know exactly what causes Narcolepsy and we don't have a cure for it either. Hopefully one day, we will be able know what causes Narcolepsy and possibly we will be able to administer a cure. Until then, there are ways of minimising the problem that Narcolepsy can bring to a sufferer either from self - help or from various drugs which have shown to be effective.

For more information, feel free to visit my website Narcolepsy Info

<http://www.narcolepsy-information.info>

.However, you must go to see a doctor if you are suffering from any medical problem.

### **The Cause And Symptoms Of Narcolepsy**

**By Heather Colman**

The main characteristic of Narcolepsy is overwhelming excessive daytime sleepiness (EDS), even after adequate nighttime sleep. A person with Narcolepsy is likely to become drowsy or to fall asleep, often at inappropriate times and places. Daytime naps may occur with or without warning and may be irresistible. These naps can occur several times a day. They are typically refreshing, but only for up to a couple hours. Drowsiness may persist for prolonged periods of time. In addition, night-time sleep may be fragmented with frequent awakenings.

Daytime sleepiness, sleep paralysis, and hypnagogic hallucinations also occur in people who do not have Narcolepsy, more frequently in people who are suffering from extreme lack of sleep. Cataplexy is generally considered to be unique to Narcolepsy.

In most cases, the first symptom of Narcolepsy to appear is excessive and overwhelming daytime sleepiness. The other symptoms may begin alone or in combination months or years after the onset of the daytime naps. There are wide variations in the development, severity, and order of appearance of cataplexy, sleep paralysis, and hypnagogic hallucinations in individuals. Only about 20 to 25 percent of people with Narcolepsy experience all four symptoms. The excessive daytime sleepiness generally persists throughout life, but sleep paralysis and hypnagogic hallucinations may not.

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The symptoms of Narcolepsy, especially the excessive daytime sleepiness and cataplexy, often become severe enough to cause serious problems in a person's social, personal, and professional lives and severely limit activities.

While the cause of Narcolepsy has not yet been determined, scientists have discovered conditions that may increase an individual's risk of having the disorder. Specifically, there appears to be a strong link between narcoleptic individuals and certain genetic conditions. One factor that may predispose an individual to Narcolepsy involves an area of Chromosome 6 known as the HLA complex. There appears to be a correlation between narcoleptic individuals and certain variations in HLA genes, although it is not required for the condition to occur.

Learning as much about Narcolepsy as possible and finding a support system can help patients and families deal with the practical and emotional effects of the disease, possible occupational limitations, and situations that might cause injury. A variety of educational and other materials are available from sleep medicine or Narcolepsy organizations. Support groups exist to help persons with Narcolepsy and their families.

Disclaimer – The information presented here should not be interpreted as medical advice. Please talk to your doctor for more information about Narcolepsy.

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