

1st Care Medical Clinic

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What in the World is Restless Leg Syndrome?

Courtesy of Staff at 1st Care Family Medical Clinic

Perhaps you've heard friends complain about being awoken by uncomfortable feelings in their legs. You may even encounter nighttime leg discomfort. Doesn't it seem like a lot of people are experiencing difficulties associated with sleep these days? Restless Leg Syndrome (RLS) is frequently coupled with sleeping troubles including difficulty falling asleep or problems staying asleep. Patients have difficulty explaining the discomfort they experience. RLS is described as an irresistible urge to move the legs, or as stinging, tingling, or crawling sensations felt deep within the legs, usually in the calves. Rarely, people feel discomfort in their arms. The symptoms usually start in the evening and are made worse with lying in bed. RLS sufferers usually find their symptoms are relieved by moving around. Victims of RLS experience such restlessness they have to get out of bed and walk to obtain relief. RLS symptoms are usually not painful, but how ironic that this non-painful condition can inflict such physical and emotional distress! Imagine having to get out of bed several times a night to relieve your leg symptoms! Perhaps you have! Be sure to talk to your doctor about it!

Researchers aren't sure what causes restless leg syndrome; nerve abnormalities are suspected, but changes in nerve structure haven't been found. RLS tends to appear "out of nowhere," without precipitating causes. Most cases of RLS are "idiopathic," they have no identifiable cause. There are a variety of factors involved with RLS; we just don't know what the factors are! It does seem that RLS "runs in" some families, which suggests a genetic cause; scientists are close to identifying the exact genes involved in some cases of RLS. The disease occurs at any time in life (even in children) although it is associated with increasing age and aging seems to make the symptoms worse. It occurs in

both males and females, but women are more often affected. RLS may arise secondary to a number of other diseases including iron deficiency, anemia, folate deficiency, kidney problems, thyroid problems, diabetes, or peripheral neuropathy. Additionally, a number of medications can cause or aggravate the symptoms of RLS.

Most patients find moving around relieves their symptoms, however this is only temporary and the annoying sleep disturbances return! If underlying disease is present, treating that disease offers relief, sometimes complete. For patients with idiopathic RLS, prevention and certain lifestyle changes may be helpful. Cutting down on caffeine, alcohol, and tobacco and establishing good sleep patterns are helpful for some patients. Exercise can be both positive and negative for RLS sufferers; some find activity helps them to sleep better, while others find it aggravates their condition. The bottom line on exercise is that “it can’t hurt to try” – exercise is so good for many other conditions. Finally, a number of medications may provide relief from RLS. Be sure to contact your health care provider to discuss your symptoms.

If you are experiencing health issues you are concerned about, we at 1st Care Family Medical Clinic, conveniently located across Glendale Ave. from The Beatitudes look forward to helping you with any medical concerns you may have.

1st Care Family Medical Clinic: where YOU will spend time with YOUR health care provider and not in the waiting room! Please call us for any questions or making an appointment 602-544-2273