



Narcolepsy Fast Facts

Narcolepsy affects an estimated 1 in every 2,000 people in the United States. That's 200,000 Americans, and approximately 3 million worldwide.

It is estimated that only 25% people who have narcolepsy have been diagnosed and are receiving treatment.

Symptoms of narcolepsy include excessive daytime sleepiness, sleep attacks, cataplexy, sleep paralysis, hallucinations, and disrupted nighttime sleep.

Cataplexy is an episode in which strong emotion causes a sudden loss of muscle tone. Muscle tone is what keeps our bodies upright and moving. Without it, we'd be like rag dolls. A cataplexy attack may be as extreme as a full body collapse, or less severe such as a slack jaw. Not everyone who has narcolepsy experiences cataplexy.

Narcolepsy with Cataplexy is also known as Narcolepsy Type 1. Narcolepsy without Cataplexy can also be called Narcolepsy Type 2.

Symptoms typically begin to occur between the ages of 10 and 30, although narcolepsy can occur at any age.

Narcolepsy can be difficult to diagnose because some of its symptoms, such as fatigue, are common to many conditions. The average time between the onset of symptoms and diagnosis is seven years.

Narcolepsy is diagnosed through a sleep study, a set of medical tests requiring an overnight stay in a sleep lab.

Misdiagnosis is common. In a recent study, 60% of patients were misdiagnosed. The most common misdiagnosis was depression (almost one-third of the patients), followed by insomnia and obstructive sleep apnea. (*Patients' Journeys to a Narcolepsy Diagnosis; Lawrence P Carter, PhD, Christine Acebo, PhD, AnnY Kim, MA*)

Scientists have confirmed that narcolepsy is caused by the loss of the two brain chemicals called hypocretins (orexins). These are neurotransmitters involved in the regulation of the sleep/wake cycle as well as other bodily functions such as blood pressure and metabolism.

While the cause of the loss of hypocretin is still unknown, current research points to a combination of genetic and environmental factors that influence the immune system.

Researchers have identified a gene that is linked to narcolepsy. About one quarter of the general population in the U.S. carries the genetic marker for narcolepsy, but only one person out of about 500 of these people will develop narcolepsy.

Narcolepsy can be treated with medications and lifestyle adjustments.

Learn more about narcolepsy at www.narcolepsynetwork.org