

Narcolepsy is neurological sleep disorder caused by the brain's inability to regulate the sleep/wake cycle. It affects about 1 in 2,000, or 200,000 Americans, and usually develops during adolescence.

Narcolepsy Symptoms:

Excessive daytime sleepiness (EDS), disrupted nighttime sleep, vivid dreams that intrude into waking hours, sleep paralysis, and cataplexy (a sudden loss of muscle tone triggered by strong emotions such as laughter). Narcolepsy is treated with medications and lifestyle management.

Common problems in school

Narcolepsy usually develops in adolescence, where EDS is often mistaken for “normal teenage behavior” or laziness. Daytime sleepiness is worse during periods of inactivity and concentration, so young *people with narcolepsy (PWNs)* may experience a variety of difficulties in school, including:



- Often being late to school or class
- Falling asleep in class
- Disorganization and forgetfulness
- Microsleep episodes and automatic behavior
- Cataplexy episodes
- Scheduling difficulties (ex: struggling to attend or stay awake in a morning class)

Narcolepsy Network® is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing early diagnosis of narcolepsy, advocating for and supporting persons with narcolepsy and their families, and promoting critical research for treatment and a cure.

For more information, visit www.narcolepsynetwork.org.



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School Accommodations for Students with Narcolepsy



a guide for educators and parents

School and Narcolepsy

Narcolepsy is similar to learning disabilities like dyslexia, in that it is an invisible disability. However, like students with more obvious disabilities, PWNs are legally entitled to academic accommodations that can help level the playing field.

Two Paths to Accommodations:

A “504 Plan” (from Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973), and the **Individual Education Plan (IEP)**, from the IDEA law. The two laws are slightly different, but both require public schools to create accommodations to help students with disabilities succeed. The laws are not mutually exclusive. Students may benefit from one or both, depending on their individual needs.

504 Plan

A 504 plan is developed by parents and school staff. It usually creates accommodations for physical disabilities or medical conditions and specifies accommodations or modifications for every class and gives guidelines for how each teacher should work with the student. The 504 plan must be reviewed at least once a year, so it grows with the student. It also applies to post-secondary education.

IEP (Individual Education Plan)

An IEP is designed to provide accommodations and specialized individual education for students with learning disabilities. An IEP requires an assessment by a licensed school psychologist. The plan is designed by special education teachers, school staff, and parents to set individual goals for the student based on their abilities. Transition planning is included in the IEP, but the plan terminates at high school graduation.

Academic Accommodations

Some helpful accommodations for students with narcolepsy include:

- **Note-taking assistance:** Sleepy note taking can produce unintelligible scribbles. Students can request a back-up note taker who will share his or her notes with the student. Recording lectures may also be helpful.
- **Extra time on tests and quizzes:** EDS, sleep attacks and microsleep episodes can also make test taking more difficult. PWNs may have difficulty focusing or begin to doze off in the middle of a test. These lapses in attention can take up time (ex: student starts to doze in the middle of a math problem, loses track of their work, and so must rework the problem several times). Arranging in advance for extra time can make the situation less stressful. Taking tests in a separate, quieter room can help eliminate distractions as well and help students focus.
- **Modified or flexible class schedules:** Since PWNs are often more alert at some times of the day than others, working with the school to schedule challenging classes around the student’s alert periods can be helpful.
- **Scheduled Naps:** Even with effective treatment, most PWNs still find short naps useful for managing symptoms. Students can make arrangements with the school to have space available for napping.



- **Adjusted/negotiated deadlines:** Since students with narcolepsy often have less energy or less time where they are able to focus on schoolwork, it can be helpful to space out due dates for projects or assignments. With this accommodation, students can arrange for adjustments to deadlines when the project is assigned.
- **Highlighted Textbooks:** Some PWNs have trouble staying alert while reading. Pre-highlighted textbooks can help students concentrate on the important information and limit the amount of reading needed.

More Information

For more information on narcolepsy, resources for students and other helpful material, visit the Narcolepsy Network website at:

www.narcolepsynetwork.org

Or email the Network at:

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