

What Every Fidgety Person Should Know *By Joel Metelits, MD*

As we have been discussing, *Living Tired* can be caused by anything that interferes with your quantity or quality of sleep. This article addresses the fidgeters—people who have difficulty sitting still due to an urge to move their legs or arms, sometimes associated with sensations of pain, tingling, or achiness.

These symptoms often improve with activity, but they worsen with inactivity—especially when sitting for a long period of time, such as when traveling in a car or airplane, attending a meeting, or watching a movie. Daily exercise helps the symptoms. The condition tends to worsen in the evening and night, but often lessens from 3 to 11 am (not an especially practical time to sleep, live, and work!).

Two disorders have been comingled in many doctors' and patients' minds: **Restless Leg Syndrome (RLS)** is a voluntary wake time urge to move one's legs, and **Periodic Limb Movement Disorder (PLMD)** is an involuntary movement of the legs or arms during sleep, reducing the patient's brain charging (sleep quality). PLMD also creates problems for the bed partners who often feel the need to sleep on the far edge of the bed out of harm's way, or to leave the bedroom altogether.

You can have RLS only, PLMD only, or both of these conditions. Anything that wakes an RLS sufferer during the night provides him or her with another opportunity to re-experience the difficulty of falling asleep only this time the sufferer may be more rested and find it even harder to fall asleep. For RLS sufferers, getting up and doing something with their legs or hands

might help: walking, riding a stationary bike, knitting, sewing, keyboarding. However, PLMD sufferers are not aware of any symptoms unless their jerking movements kick themselves out of bed, or fling a small pet across the room! The inability to keep a top sheet tucked in on the foot of the bed is a classic sign of RLS or PLMD.

Patients with RLS have to be very tired to fall asleep on their own and since this phenomena is worse in the evenings, any nap taken later in the day may leave them too rested to fall asleep. Pure PLMD patients can fall asleep quickly but do not get enough deep sleep.

What things can make fidgeters more fidgety?

- Low iron levels, which can be caused by bleeding, chronic inflammation, or blood donation. Menstruating women with PLMD or RLS may experience extra trouble when their iron levels drop temporarily by the second or third night of menstruating leaving them vulnerable to sleep deprivation and its consequences.
- Antidepressants in the Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs) category can worsen RLS and PLMD making patients "hyper". This has occasionally led to a false diagnosis of "Bi-polar Disorder."
- Leg swelling from problems with the leg veins.
- Peripheral neuropathy which has many causes but is commonly the result of diabetes.

RLS can also be identified by suffers' severe reactions to situations of "confinement":

- Avoiding flying (they may tolerate an aisle seat but do not like flying).
- Avoiding going to the movies (unless they have an aisle seat, or can actively eat popcorn). They may prefer watching a movie at home where they can take as many intermissions as possible or can simultaneously do something like folding laundry, knitting or texting.
- Picking jobs which allow them to be active and on their feet as opposed to physically confining jobs like telemarketing or desk jobs in a cubical.
- Struggling to sit still in a classroom environment (sometimes being misdiagnosed as having ADHD).
- Inability to tolerate meetings without having to get up, fidget, doodle, etc.

These conditions have a strong genetic tendency. An alcoholic beverage is observed by some RLS patients to help them settle down in the evening, which may become a lifestyle that can lead to abuse. If you can identify with any of these problems, do talk to your doctor. Without proper diagnosis and treatment, the fidgety person will continue to *Live Tired*.



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