

Aging Well with Muscular Dystrophy: Physical and other factors that affect sleep

By researchers at the University of Washington's Aging Rehabilitation Research and manage them. Many medical problems can disrupt sleep in people with muscular dystrophy, such as breathing problems (sleep apnea, for example), muscle spasms or stiffness, and pain. A brief overview of common physical reasons for sleep problems is below.

Sleep apnea

Sleep apnea is when there is reduced airflow or breathing during sleep. Symptoms can be mild or dangerous. On the dangerous side, people can often stop breathing for short time during sleep. Sleep apnea occurs for different reasons.

Problems can develop because air passage ways are blocked or narrowed (called obstructive sleep apnea). *Obstructive sleep apnea* is often caused by weak lung and throat muscles, from

Because there are the different treatments for each type of sleep apnea, a doctor can diagnose the type. Examples of treatments include lifestyle changes (losing weight and exercising), surgeries to "clear up" obstructions in the mouth and throat, and machines like continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machines. Please consult your doctor or muscular dystrophy specialist to discuss these options. Your doctor may recommend seeing specialized sleep doctors or therapists.

More information about sleep apnea and its causes and treatments can also be found at The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) by calling 301 592 8573 or http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/SleepApnea/SleepApnea_WhatIsSleepApnea.html

Muscle problems

In addition to problems with the muscles that affect breathing, people with sleep problems often report muscles that are tight, itchy, jerky, or painful. One common problem is called Restless Legs Syndrome (RLS).

RLS occurs when people have a strong urge to move their legs when they lie down or sit. Symptoms are described as creeping, crawling, tingling or burning. When people move their legs, they often feel better, but the relief does not last long.

People also can have sudden muscles movements or spasms in their leg and arm muscles. Symptoms can include mild muscle stiffness to severe and painful muscle spasms.

Some of the symptoms associated with restless leg syndrome and movements in the legs can be improved by mild exercise, relaxation techniques, and stretches. Medications are also available to help. Your sleep doctor or muscular dystrophy specialist can help you develop ways to treat your symptoms.

Pain

cause more sleep problems over

The contents of this column were developed under a grant from the Department of Education, NIDRR grant number H133B080024. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should policythe