



Important Things to Know About Sleepwalking

- It is a disorder of moving around while asleep.
- It is most common in young children and many recover before reaching adulthood.
- It can be caused by stress, trauma or the start of a mental or physical illness.
- Most cases can be treated.

What is sleepwalking?

Sleep walkers get out of bed and move around the house during deep sleep. Sometimes they may leave the house. Sleep walking usually occurs for just a few minutes at a time and may occur up to 3 or 4 nights per week. However some people sleep walk for longer periods of time and less often. When it is over, most people are able to remember very little of what they did, if anything at all. Usually, sleepwalking starts in childhood, becomes less common as a teenager and stops as a young adult. However for some people, it may continue for most of their life. The longer a child keeps sleepwalking into their teenage years, the greater the chance that it will go on into early adulthood.

What causes sleepwalking?

For some people, sleep walking is an inherited condition. For children it may also be related to a stage of development. Not getting enough sleep, having irregular sleep hours, stress, drugs and some medicines increase the risk of sleepwalking. In addition, medical conditions such as [sleep apnoea](#), seizures and fever can contribute to the likelihood of sleepwalking. If you are prone to sleepwalking, then sounds that disturb your sleep can

also make you sleepwalk. However, not uncommonly a cause cannot be found.

How common is sleepwalking?

Surveys suggest that 2 or 3 children in 100 sleepwalk often and approximately 5 in 100 children sleep walk sometimes. In adults, 3 or 4 in 100 say that they have sleepwalked at least once in their lives, but only 4 in 1000 are still sleepwalking. Of those who sleepwalked as a child, less than a quarter continue to do so as adults. Some people may stop sleepwalking after childhood, but it may come back if they are unwell or stressed.

How does it affect people?

If sleepwalkers wake up suddenly, they may be confused. Sometimes they may not be able to quickly go back to sleep. This will prevent the sleepwalker from having a good night's sleep and make them tired during the day. It can also cause [anxiety](#) and [depression](#). Sometimes an injury may occur by bumping into objects or leaving the house. However, the number of injuries is less than you might expect, given the number of people who sleepwalk.

How is sleepwalking treated?

In a child, sleepwalking may just be part of growing up. Parents should be able to comfort the child and direct him/her back to bed after they sleepwalk. With time, they tend to grow out of it. Action should be taken only if it happens too often and has a big impact on the child. This might be if they feel tired during the day from a lack of sleep or they are at risk of injuring themselves. In adults who sleepwalk, it is important to have good sleep habits (see [Good Sleep Habits](#)). This may reduce the frequency of sleepwalking. Occasionally, sleeping tablets may be used, but this should be discussed with a doctor.

What might a doctor do?

A doctor can give advice about improving sleep habits, having a better night's sleep and making it less dangerous for the sleepwalker. Occasionally, a referral may be made to a psychologist or sleep specialist. There are treatments to control how often you sleepwalk. Adults may also be prescribed sedatives for short term use. These can stop sleepwalking.

What could you do to help with symptoms?

There are ways to make it happen less (see [Good Sleep Habits](#)). Try to reduce your stress levels. Stay away from caffeine and other stimulants before bedtime. Try to stay safe when you sleepwalk. Lock windows so you won't try to go out through them. You may want to put bells on doors to wake up other people in the house. Baby monitors can also be useful so others can hear you if you start moving around at night.

Where and when should you seek help?

If sleepwalking is affecting how you or your child functions during the day, you should talk to your local doctor.

Where can I find out more?

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sleepwalking>

http://www.emedicinehealth.com/sleepwalking/article_em.htm

This information is produced by:

Sleep Health Foundation

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A national organisation devoted to education, advocacy and supporting research into sleep and its disorders

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A voluntary group offering assistance and support to people and their families living with sleep disorders

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The peak national association of clinicians and scientists devoted to investigation of sleep and its disorders

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Ongoing concerns about sleep or other medical conditions should be discussed with your local doctor.

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