

## Restless Legs Syndrome

### Definition

An irresistible urge to move the legs, which is often at its worst at night. RLS is mainly idiopathic (Primary RLS) with the mechanism postulated to be linked to Dopamine. Starting mainly in women around 40 years of age, primarily RLS is often a progressive condition.

Secondary RLS is less common and occurs where there is a known cause such as Iron Deficiency Anaemia or Kidney Failure. By nature this is mainly a sudden onset condition.

### Symptoms

RLS affects up to 10% of the UK population with symptoms ranging from a minor irritation to intolerable.

Fatigue and sleepiness as a result of disrupted sleep patterns can have a profound impact on the individual's health and wellbeing.

### Investigation / Assessment

Unfortunately, RLS is often misdiagnosed or simply unrecognised on presenting to a healthcare professional. Evidence shows it can take as long as 10 to 20 years of symptoms before a sufferer is treated successfully.

The International Restless Legs Syndrome Study Group (IRLSSG) has proposed a set of RLS diagnostic criteria: <https://www.rls-uk.org/diagnosis> to help diagnose RLS.

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### Investigation / Assessment (contd.)

Simple questioning is very effective too, such as "When you try to relax in the evening or sleep at night, do you ever have unpleasant, restless feelings in your legs that can be relieved by walking or movement?"

The IRLSSG have also designed a severity scale by which we can classify the condition from mild to very severe.

### Possible treatments available

There are many gadgets on the market but none show evidence of being curative.

Stretching, diet and relaxation all play a positive role as part of general lifestyle advice for RLS. There are various options for the GP including levodopa, Dopamine agonist, anticonvulsants and for those suffering debilitating pain opioids are often prescribed.

### Follow-up / prevention of regression

Some medications can exacerbate RLS symptoms such as anti-nausea drugs and sedating antihistamines owing to their action on dopamine receptors.

Antidepressants and cold and flu remedies should also be offered with caution.

Some antacids can have a similar negative effect.

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### Case Study

TO FOLLOW



# About The British Society of Pharmacy Sleep Services



Our independent research established that the general public 'often' to 'very often' consult a community pharmacist about suspected sleep disorders.

We aim to empower the community pharmacist to assess, screen and recognise these individuals in order to help patients progress rapidly to appropriate care.

The BSPSS was established in 2021 to plug the disconnect between sleep expertise and the public, and in 2022 we became a registered charity.

We recognise the community pharmacist as the front-line healthcare professional.

**Click here to take your learning further with free BSPSS membership, training and support**

