

Narcolepsy is a sleep disorder, involving irregular patterns in Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep and significant disruptions of the normal sleep/wake cycle. While the cause of narcolepsy is not completely understood, current research points to a combination of genetic and environmental factors that influence the immune system.

Symptoms of Narcolepsy include the following:

- Excessive Daytime Sleepiness (EDS), an overwhelming sense of tiredness and fatigue throughout the day
- Poor quality of sleep because the sleep/wake patterns are disrupted
- Micro-naps (falling asleep for a few seconds) and sleep attacks (an overwhelming urge to sleep)
- Abnormal REM sleep, detectable only by sleep lab tests
- REM intrusion into daytime wakefulness
- Cataplexy, events during which a person has no reflex or voluntary muscle control. For example knees buckle and even give way when experiencing a strong emotion—laughter, joy, surprise, anger or heads drop or jaws go slack from the same kind of stimuli
- Hypnagogic hallucinations, events of vivid audio and visual events that a person with narcolepsy experiences while falling asleep, or while awakening
- Sleep paralysis, a limpness in the body associated with REM sleep resulting in temporary paralysis when the individual is falling asleep, or awakening

Narcolepsy is diagnosed through a sleep study, a set of medical tests including an overnight Polysomnogram (PSG) and a Multiple Sleep Latency Test (MSLT). Even when clear-cut cataplexy is present a sleep study is necessary to rule out sleep apnea and other possible sleep disorders contributing to EDS.