

## What is Sleep Paralysis?

Sleep paralysis is a phenomenon in which a person either during falling asleep (Hypnagogia) or awakening (Hypnopompia), temporarily experiences an inability to move, speak, or react while fully conscious. This can be associated with dreamlike imagery or a pressure on the chest or a feeling of breathlessness.

It usually occurs because of an abrupt awakening from dream sleep.

Normally during dream sleep we have muscle atonia (loss of muscle tone, or muscle weakness) which prevents us acting out our dreams. If we abruptly wake out of dream sleep before muscle tone has been restored, then we will have the symptoms of sleep paralysis which usually lasts between seconds to minutes.

Most patients have isolated sleep paralysis with no other symptoms.

The condition is common, with at least 4% of the population having experienced one or more attacks. Sleep paralysis is also seen in dream sleep disorders such as narcolepsy, and is more likely to occur following a period of irregular sleep, sleep deprivation or excess alcohol intake.

Sleep paralysis is very unpleasant but entirely benign and it is rare that pharmacotherapy (drugs) are needed.

