

Patient Teaching Tool

Restless Legs Syndrome

Restless Legs Syndrome (RLS) can be quite troubling for patients with kidney disease. Some people report an itchy feeling, while others report a crawling or “creepy” sensation. Still others report aching or burning in their legs. These uncomfortable feelings cause the person to want to move - walk, pace, jiggle their legs and feet or toss and turn in bed - to try and stop the discomfort.

RLS is usually worse after sitting or lying down for extended periods of time. The symptoms usually gets worse as the day goes on, and they are worst at night or on hemodialysis. The urge to move the legs can disrupt sleep or dialysis session.

RLS often affects people with kidney disease but is also associated with many other health conditions. It can run in families.

Tips for Managing Restless Legs Syndrome

To help prevent restless legs:

- Avoid or limit caffeine, alcohol and nicotine.
- Plan for breaks or periods of time to walk around and stretch.
- Try to do some form of physical activity each day. Staying active during the day can help you sleep better at night. Find activities that you enjoy and fit in with your daily life.

- Try activities that enhance mental alertness, e.g. crossword, puzzles, video games.
- Acupuncture and acupressure may also help to decrease symptoms.
- If you have tried these things and they are not working, talk to your doctor about whether a medication might help.
- For hemodialysis patients, discuss with your physician whether aerobic exercise training during dialysis is an option for you, e.g. cycling with resistance training.

To ease the discomfort of restless legs:

- Apply a warm towel or heating pad to your legs, or take a warm shower or bath. Cold compresses or cool baths help some people.
- Stretch and/or massage your legs with your hands.
- Listen to quiet, calming music or do another activity to help you relax and get your mind off your feelings of restlessness (e.g., crossword puzzles or talk to someone).
- For tips on a getting a good night’s sleep, read the patient teaching tool “Feeling Tired? Having Difficulty Sleeping?”