

Sleep paralysis

Sleep paralysis is when you cannot move or speak as you are waking up or falling asleep. It can be scary but it's harmless. Most people will only get it once or twice in their life.

What happens during sleep paralysis

During sleep paralysis you may feel:

- awake but cannot move, speak or open your eyes
- like someone is in your room
- like something is pushing you down
- frightened

These feelings can last up to several minutes.

Causes of sleep paralysis

Sleep paralysis happens when you cannot move your muscles as you are waking up or falling asleep. This is because you are in sleep mode but your brain is active.

It is not clear why sleep paralysis can happen but it has been linked with:

- [insomnia](#)
- disrupted sleeping patterns – for example, because of shift work or jet lag
- narcolepsy – a long-term condition that causes a person to suddenly fall asleep
- [post-traumatic stress disorder \(PTSD\)](#)
- [general anxiety disorder](#)
- [panic disorder](#)
- a family history of sleep paralysis

Things you can do to help prevent sleep paralysis

Do

- ✓ try to get 6 to 8 hours of sleep a day
- ✓ go to bed at roughly the same time each night and get up at the same time each morning
- ✓ get regular exercise, but not in the 4 hours before going to bed

Don't

- ✗ do not eat a big meal, smoke, or drink alcohol or caffeine shortly before going to bed
- ✗ do not sleep on your back – this can make sleep paralysis more likely to happen

Contact your GP if:

You often have sleep paralysis and you feel:

- very anxious or scared to go to sleep
- tired all the time due to lack of sleep

Treating sleep paralysis

Your GP may be able to treat an underlying condition that could be triggering sleep paralysis. These include insomnia or post-traumatic stress disorder.

If this does not help they might refer you to a doctor who specialises in sleep conditions.

Treatment from a specialist

You might be given medicine that is usually used to treat depression. Taking this type of medicine at a lower dose can also help with sleep paralysis.

Your GP may recommend [cognitive behavioural therapy \(CBT\)](#).

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