

Sleep Paralysis

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In REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep, your voluntary muscles are paralyzed so you do not act out your dreams. If you happen to wake up out of REM sleep, perhaps because of a disturbing dream or nightmare, your muscles may still be paralyzed for a few moments. Often, the dream content will carry over into the wakeful state for a few moments as well. The first time or two it happens it can be quite scary because you cannot move or speak. You may even feel like you cannot breathe or you are being suffocated. Although your voluntary muscles are paralyzed and you are unable to voluntarily take a deep breath, the involuntary muscles of your diaphragm keep you breathing normally and you are safe. The next thing you know, the hallucination is gone, everything is back to normal and you can move and speak again.



Sleep paralysis is a normal physiological state of sleep occurring at an abnormal time because you are awake. It may be triggered by disturbed sleep secondary to stress or poor *sleep hygiene* causing you to wake out of REM sleep. About half the population will experience this at least once or twice in a lifetime. Working on improving your *sleep hygiene* and sleep quality may help resolve this phenomenon. It is also a common symptom of *Narcolepsy*. If sleep paralysis is happening to you fairly often and is associated with excessive daytime sleepiness, you should talk to your doctor about it.