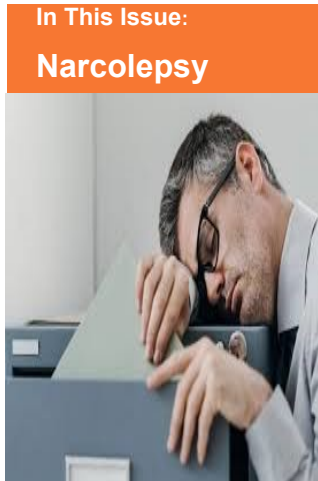




## MONTHLY MENTAL HEALTH NEWSLETTER

Presented by the Gwinnett County Sheriff's Office Mental Health Task Force



### In This Issue: Narcolepsy

## What is Narcolepsy?

Narcolepsy is a sleep disorder that renders the sufferer very drowsy during the daytime. It is extremely hard for the sufferer to stay awake even while attempting to do daily task. In acute cases they may fall asleep suddenly. This can cause serious problems in their daily life and even become dangerous if the condition goes untreated.

### Symptoms of Narcolepsy

**Excessive daytime sleepiness.** People with Narcolepsy fall asleep without warning. It can happen anywhere and at any time. Even while actively doing a task.

**Sudden loss of muscle tone/ functionality.** This condition is called **cataplexy**. It can cause slurred speech or complete weakness of most muscles. Symptoms may last a few minutes or more.

**Sleep paralysis**  
Can't move or speak while falling asleep or upon waking.

**Hallucinations**  
Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting things that are not there or tactile feelings that are not real.

**Changes in rapid eye movement (REM) sleep**  
Reaching REM up to 6 times faster than normal and during the day.

### Living with Narcolepsy

People living with Narcolepsy may be working or be involved in a conversation, activities or even driving and suddenly fall asleep. They may remain asleep a few minutes or up to a half hour. When they awaken they may feel a bit more refreshed, but they will soon feel sleepy again. This condition can also decrease one's level of alertness and ability to focus, especially during the day. Persistent sleepiness during the daytime is usually the first symptom experienced.

Some people with Narcolepsy continue doing a task when they fall asleep briefly. For example, they may fall asleep while writing, typing or driving. They might continue to perform that task while asleep. When they awaken, they can't remember what they did and whatever they did may have been done very haphazardly, even dangerously.

Sufferers may experience other sleep disorders such as Insomnia as well as, Obstructive Sleep Apnea, (*a condition in which breathing starts and stops during the night.*) Others may physically act out their dreams, (known as REM Sleep Behavior Disorder). REM Sleep Behavior Disorder can be very dangerous due to the sufferer being unaware of their behavior and surroundings, and it can be very disruptive and alarming to others in their environment.

Narcolepsy is divided into two types. Type 1 Narcolepsy usually presents with **cataplexy**. Type 2 Narcolepsy generally does not present with **cataplexy**.

### What are the Risk Factors and Causes of Narcolepsy?

#### Right now there are only two known Risk Factors:

**Age.**  
Narcolepsy typically begins between ages 10 and 30.

**Family history.**  
Your risk of Narcolepsy is 20 to 40 times higher if you have a close family member who has it.

**Causes:**  
The exact cause of Narcolepsy is unknown. People with Type 1 Narcolepsy have low levels of hypocretin, also called orexin. Hypocretin is a chemical in the brain that helps control being awake and when you enter REM sleep. Hypocretin is also low in people with **cataplexy**.

While we don't know why people may have low levels of hypocretin. It is suspected it may be due to an autoimmune reaction. An autoimmune reaction is when the body's immune system destroys its own cells.

Genetics may also play a role in Narcolepsy. Even so the risk of a parent passing this disorder to a child is only about 1% to 2%. Research indicates that in some cases Narcolepsy may be linked to exposure to the swine flu (H1N1 flu) virus. It also may be linked to a certain form of the H1N1 vaccine. This vaccine was administered in Europe.

**Treatment and Prognosis**  
Narcolepsy is a life-long condition for which there is no cure. Medicines such as certain stimulants, Modafinil and Wakix among others, along with life-style changes can help manage the symptoms. Support from family, friends, employers and teachers can help people cope with the disorder.

### REFERENCES

The G.C.S.O. Mental Health Task Force encourages you to utilize the sources listed below and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) at [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov) to learn more about this and important mental health topics.

Diagnostic Statistical Manual –V, American Psychiatric Association, Washington, DC. June 2013

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/12147-narcolepsy>

<https://www.ninds.nih.gov/health-information/disorders/narcolepsy>

[gcsomhtaskforce@gwinnettcounty.com](mailto:gcsomhtaskforce@gwinnettcounty.com)

**Major T. Maldonado, Unit Commander**  
770 619-6798

**Dr. D. E. Tatum, Clinical Director**  
770 822-3111

