

# UNDERSTANDING *parasomnias*

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The American Academy  
of Sleep Medicine  
[www.aasmnet.org](http://www.aasmnet.org)

# **HAS THIS HAPPENED** *to you?*

## **HAVE YOU . . .**

**Woken up outside your bedroom without remembering getting out of bed?**

**Had your bed partner tell you that you woke up yelling but you can't even remember your dream?**

**Had very upsetting dreams night after night?**

If so, you may have a sleep disorder in a group called parasomnias.

## **WHAT ARE PARASOMNIAS?**

Parasomnias are a group of sleep disorders that involve unwanted events or experiences while falling asleep, sleeping, or waking up.

People who have parasomnias may find it hard to sleep through the night or wake up exhausted.

# LEARN ABOUT COMMON PARASOMNIAS

**SLEEPWALKING:** Sleepwalking occurs when you get out of bed and walk around even though you are still asleep. You may wake up in another room or outside your home and not remember how you got there.

**MYTH:** *Waking up someone who is sleepwalking is dangerous for him or her.*

**TRUTH:** *A sleepwalker will not be harmed by being woken up, but someone who is sleepwalking may be confused or angry when awakened. It is best to gently guide the sleepwalker back to bed.*

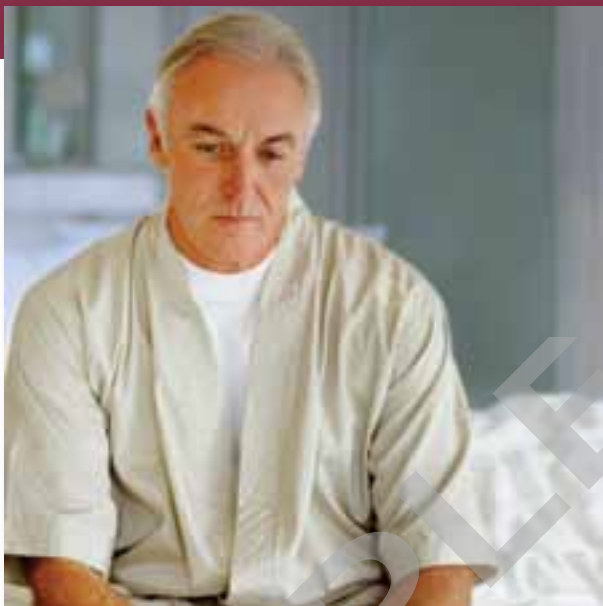


**NIGHT TERRORS:** Night terrors happen in the first half of the night. When you wake up, you remember very little about your dream. Your bed partner may be alarmed because people waking up from night terrors often scream or are very upset.

**NIGHTMARE DISORDER:** Everyone has bad dreams now and then. However, if you have nightmare disorder, then you often have vivid and disturbing nightmares that disrupt your sleep.

**BEDWETTING (ALSO CALLED ENURESIS):** Adults, as well as children, may unintentionally urinate in bed. Sometimes this is a sign of another medical problem, such as diabetes or a urinary tract infection. Do not be embarrassed to talk with your health care provider. Your health care provider can help determine what is causing this medical problem.

**TEETH GRINDING (ALSO CALLED BRUXISM):** Many people grind or clench their teeth while they sleep. The noise may affect your sleep or your bed partner's sleep. Teeth grinding can also damage your teeth.



## **OTHER SLEEP DISORDERS**

Some sleep disorders may cause parasomnias or make them worse.

**OBSTRUCTIVE SLEEP APNEA:** Obstructive Sleep Apnea, or OSA, is a common sleep disorder. If you have OSA, it means that your airway collapses part or all of the way while you are sleeping. OSA can cause you to wake up during the night. Many times, you don't even realize that you're waking. These night awakenings can lead to more sleepwalking, nightmares, and wetting the bed.

## **WHO IS AT RISK FOR PARASOMNIAS?**

**CHILDREN:** Many children sleepwalk or wet the bed but then outgrow these problems. If you notice that these problems get worse or do not improve with age, talk with a health care provider.

**PEOPLE WITH FAMILY MEMBERS WITH PARASOMNIAS:** If sleepwalking or night terrors run in your family, you are more likely to have them.

**PEOPLE UNDER STRESS:** Some people are more likely to sleepwalk or have other parasomnias when they are under stress. You may sleepwalk while undergoing a stressful situation but stop when the situation ends.

**PEOPLE WITH POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER:** If you have been diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), you may be more likely to have nightmare disorder.

**PEOPLE USING OR ABUSING ALCOHOL OR DRUGS:** People who are using or abusing alcohol or drugs are more likely to sleepwalk or have night terrors.

## **HOW ARE PARASOMNIAS TREATED?**

Treatments for parasomnias may involve medication or behavioral therapy. Teeth grinding can be treated with an oral appliance made by a dentist. If your parasomnia is caused by another sleep disorder, the parasomnia may improve or resolve when the other sleep disorder is treated.

If you keep sleepwalking, there are steps you can take to make your home safer.

- Add locks or alarms to windows and doors
- Sleep on the ground floor
- Clear your bedroom of things that might cause you to trip or fall

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***It is important to seek medical treatment if your behaviors are dangerous to yourself or others.***

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**If you think you may have a parasomnia, speak with your health care provider.**

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