

7 Parasomnia

Narrator:

For most people, sleeping is easy and straightforward. For others, it can be a real nightmare!

Some people dream of being attacked and may even fight with their partners while they sleep. Other people get up and walk around in their sleep—without knowing what they are doing. These sleep conditions—called parasomnia—can be dangerous.

Scientists are hoping to find out why they occur.

Parasomnia happens during the period before REM sleep. REM sleep is the stage of sleep when we dream. The time before this is when people may sleep-walk, sleep-talk, or even sleep-eat. Yet they have no knowledge of their activities.

Parasomnia happens during a time in the sleep cycle called NREM or non-REM: Non-Rapid Eye Movement. NREM contains four stages. During stage one, your brain is producing small waves, and you are in a light sleep. In stage two, your body relaxes and your heartbeat and breathing gets slower. The brain waves are larger and become further apart. The deepest sleep is during stages three and four. For most of us, our brains shut off sounds and movement from the outside world.

But for sleepwalkers, the lower part of the brain “wakes up,” while the upper part—the thinking brain, or the mind—is asleep. This is why sleepwalkers are able to move around at night, and yet they don’t remember it the next day. With further research, scientists hope one day to fully explain this mysterious event.

