

REM Sleep Behavior Disorder

Rapid eye movement (REM) Sleep Behavior Disorder is a sleep disorder that causes a person to display verbal and physical reactions to unpleasant dreams while they sleep. It may appear as if the person is intensely acting out the dream in their sleep. RBD may develop alongside of motor symptoms but it often comes before the PD diagnosis by approximately 5-10 years.

What causes REM Sleep Behavior Disorder?

- The REM stage of sleep is usually when people stop moving around and is the stage when dreams occur. People stop moving during REM sleep because the nerves that cause voluntary movements get turned “off”
- In people with Parkinson’s, it is believed that the nerves that control voluntary movements do not get turned “off” so dreams get acted out during sleep.

Symptoms of REM Sleep Behavior Disorder

- movements such as kicking, punching, arm flailing, or jumping from bed in response to a dream
- noises such as talking, screaming, cursing, or laughing
- being able to recall the dream if you awaken during the episode

What to Expect as a Care Partner

- To protect your own safety, you may need to sleep in a separate room from your spouse so they do not harm you while they sleep.
- To protect the person with Parkinson's, you may need to lower the bed, move furniture away from the bed, add soft padding to the corners of furniture, secure and block windows, and remove weapons or sharp objects from the bedroom.
- Bring up any sleep concerns with your loved one's care team. They may be able to prescribe a sleep medication or they may recommend adding an over the counter sleep aid into the regimen to help alleviate or lessen symptoms.
- If it is safe to do so, gently wake the person who is having the dream to break the REM sleep cycle.