

A guide to better understanding the sleep stages

When people sleep, they move through a series of stages, each with a different purpose and benefit. With narcolepsy, you don't move through these stages normally because your brain can't properly regulate your sleep cycle.

This can prevent you from getting refreshing, restorative sleep.

THE SLEEP STAGES*

There are 4 stages of sleep, divided into 2 categories:



*During a typical night of sleep, someone will cycle through these stages multiple times.

See the next page to learn more about the different stages of sleep, their purpose, and how they comprise a sleep cycle.

STAGE 1: NREM

This is the first and shortest stage, lasting 1 to 5 minutes, which is a transition period between wakefulness and sleep. People are easy to wake in this stage because the body hasn't yet fully relaxed.

STAGE 2: NREM

This stage can last for 10 to 25 minutes or longer. Body temperature drops, muscles relax, and breathing and heart rate slow down. Brain activity slows too, but there are short bursts believed to help resist awakening. About half of total sleep time is usually spent in stage 2.

STAGE 3: NREM

This is deep sleep, also referred to as slow-wave sleep, and it occurs more often during the first half of the night. This stage can last 20 to 40 minutes, during which it becomes very difficult to awaken. Brain waves slow down, and experts believe that this stage is when restorative sleep occurs, allowing for mental and physical recovery and growth. It may also have an effect on memory and the immune system.

REM

During this stage, brain activity increases, reaching levels similar to being awake, and dreams occur. All muscles except for the eyes and those needed for breathing are paralyzed. In fact, the eyes move very fast during this stage, which is why it's called "rapid eye movement" sleep. As the night goes on, the length of REM sleep increases.

People with narcolepsy reach REM sleep much sooner than most other people, sometimes almost immediately after falling asleep. And narcolepsy can even cause people to enter REM sleep while they're awake.