

# Researchers discover link between common sleep disorder and high blood pressure

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An international team of researchers, led by Emory University clinician scientists, has found evidence that people suffering from moderate to severe cases of restless legs syndrome (RLS) are at significantly increased risk for developing hypertension.

RLS, a common and debilitating sleep disorder, adversely affects the lives of tens of millions of people worldwide. The study findings were conducted by scientists at Emory University with colleagues at deCODE Genetics, Inc., an Icelandic genomics company, and Icelandic physicians at Landspítali in Reykjavik.

The findings will be presented June 12th at the 21st Annual Meeting of the Associated Professional Sleep Societies in Minneapolis, Minn.

RLS is a condition that produces an intense, often irresistible urge to move the legs because of creeping, crawling, tingling or burning sensations. RLS affects approximately 10 percent of the U.S. population, causing considerable discomfort, insomnia and sleep disruption in people of all ages. Symptoms can occur when people are awake or asleep.

David Rye, MD, PhD, professor of neurology at Emory University School of Medicine, director of the Emory Program in Sleep and lead author of the study, says the association between RLS and increased risk for high blood pressure was confirmed with the new study.

"Our results confirm and extend accumulating evidence that periodic leg

movements of sleep (PLMs) seen in most RLS patients are associated with increased release of adrenaline," says Dr. Rye.

"Of greatest import, these findings suggest that the clinical significance of PLMs extends beyond sleep disruption and sleepiness," he says. "Our findings indicate that in addition to treating RLS symptoms, effective treatments may also need to target PLMs, particularly in patients at high-risk for cardiovascular disease (e.g., those with strong family histories of premature cardiovascular disease, smoking, etc.).

Source: Emory University

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