



How to Manage

# Restless Legs Syndrome

## This guide will help you understand:

What is restless legs syndrome?	1
What causes restless legs syndrome?	2
What can I do to help manage restless legs syndrome?	3
When should I talk to my healthcare team?	4

This guide is written for people living with kidney disease and those who help care for them. It does not replace advice from your healthcare team (for example, your nephrologist, nurses, social worker, dietitian, pharmacist, and family doctor).

## What is Restless Legs Syndrome?

**Restless Legs Syndrome causes an uncomfortable urge to move your legs when you are at rest.**

- Your legs (or sometimes your arms) may feel itchy or may have a crawling, aching, painful, or burning feeling
- Restless Legs Syndrome can be hard to describe. It is not the same as the cramping that some people feel during dialysis treatments or the nerve pain that some people feel from diabetes.
- Restless Legs Syndrome may make you want to walk around or toss and turn in bed to stop the uncomfortable feeling. This can make it hard to sleep.



**Tell your healthcare team if you have symptoms of Restless Legs Syndrome. Your healthcare team needs to know if it affects your everyday activities, sleep, or quality of life.**

## What Causes Restless Legs Syndrome?

There are many causes of Restless Legs Syndrome but not all of the causes are known. Restless Legs Syndrome is common for people living with kidney disease. Restless Legs Syndrome can happen during dialysis treatments. It causes an urge to move around that can make the treatments harder to cope with.

### Restless Legs Syndrome has also been linked to:

- Low blood iron levels
- Anemia (low red blood cell count)
- Pregnancy
- Not getting enough vitamins
- Not getting enough dialysis
- Other medical conditions (for example, arthritis and Parkinson's disease)
- Using alcohol, caffeine, and tobacco



## What Can I Do To Manage Restless Legs Syndrome?

### Tips to help prevent or reduce discomfort from Restless Legs Syndrome:

- Do activities that take your mind off of the discomfort by shifting your focus
  - Visit, call, or text a friend or family member
  - Try activities such as crossword puzzles or Sudoku, needlework, reading, or video games
  - Listen to quiet, calming music
- Try to exercise every day
  - Find activities that you enjoy and that fit in with your daily life, for example walking (if it is safe for you)
  - Being active during the day can help you sleep better at night
  - Talk to your healthcare team about how to exercise safely
- Stretch your legs or massage them with your hands
- Put a warm towel or heating pad on your legs, or take a warm shower or bath
  - If warmth does not help, try a cold compress or a cool shower or bath
- Good sleep habits may help – for more tips on getting a good nights sleep, go to [www.ontariorenalnetwork.ca/symptoms](http://www.ontariorenalnetwork.ca/symptoms) and read the Ontario Renal Network's Fatigue Symptom Self-Management Guide
- If you are taking medication for Restless Legs Syndrome, take it exactly as prescribed – do not wait for your symptoms to get really bad
- If you are getting dialysis and your dialysis unit offers stationary bikes, cycling during dialysis may help
- Limit caffeine and alcohol, especially in the evening
- Do not smoke or ask your healthcare team for support to quit smoking

## When Should I Talk To My Healthcare Team?

Speak to your healthcare team if you have symptoms of Restless Legs Syndrome or if your symptoms are getting worse. Your healthcare team may talk about treatment options such as exercise, stretching, relaxation techniques, massage therapy, or medication.

### Write down your symptoms and tell your healthcare team about them:

- What does it feel like?
- When does it happen?
- How long does it last?
- How bad was it?
- What makes it better or worse?



**Your healthcare team wants to know if you have symptoms of Restless Legs Syndrome. Your concerns and questions are important. Do not be afraid to share them.**

# Notes

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

The Ontario Renal Network gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the many patients, caregivers and providers that were involved in preparing this Symptom Self-Management Guide.

This document is designed to provide people living with kidney disease with information about Restless Legs Syndrome. It is not intended to be a substitute for the advice of a qualified health professional, nor is it intended to provide a comprehensive list of treatment options. As treatment options and standards are constantly evolving, we do not guarantee that the information in this document is current. Always ask your healthcare team if you have questions or concerns.

**Need this information in an accessible format?**

1-855-460-2647, TTY 416-217-1815, publicaffairs@cancercare.on.ca Jun. 2019 ORN4060