

# Narcolepsy Quick Facts

**Definition:** Narcolepsy is a *chronic neurological disorder* in which the brain loses the ability to maintain normal sleep and wake states. Affects 1 in every 2,000 people (200,000 Americans, 3 million people worldwide).

## Symptoms:

- Periods of *extreme sleepiness* during the day, comparable to staying awake for 48-72 hours straight.
- *Cataplexy* is a sudden loss of muscle tone, resulting in the inability to move. Emotions such as laughter or anger often trigger cataplexy.
- *Hallucinations* while falling asleep or waking that are often frightening.
- *Sleep paralysis* upon waking or falling asleep, during which an individual is awake but cannot move.
- *Disrupted nighttime sleep.*

## Causes:

- There are two forms of narcolepsy: *Narcolepsy with Cataplexy* (N+C) and *Narcolepsy without Cataplexy* (N-C).

- In N+C, an autoimmune reaction destroys the brain's hypocretin-producing cells. Hypocretin neurotransmitters are essential to properly regulate sleep and wakefulness.
- The cause(s) of N-C are not well understood.

### **Diagnosis:**

- Many primary care doctors are unfamiliar with the basic symptoms of narcolepsy.
- Individuals experience symptoms for an average of 3 to 5 years before receiving an accurate diagnosis and 10 to 15 year delays are not uncommon.

### **Treatment:**

- Narcolepsy is a chronic, lifelong condition. There is ***no cure*** for narcolepsy.
- Treatments can improve quality of life greatly.
- Leading FDA-approved medications are Provigil, Nuvigil and Xyrem. A variety of other medications are prescribed off-label as well.
- Many patients manage their narcolepsy with ***multiple*** medications and diligent personal attention to their health.

### **Living with Narcolepsy:**

- Narcolepsy can cause ***serious disruptions*** to daily routine and compromise education, employment, and family opportunities.
- Narcolepsy's affect upon quality of life is comparable to ***epilepsy*** and ***Parkinson's disease***.