

Health Tips

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Dreams & Nightmares

When you sleep, there are two different kinds of sleep that you cycle through in stages: REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep and non-REM sleep. During REM sleep, your eyes move back and forth under your closed eyelids. Dreams and nightmares mostly occur during REM sleep, while your deepest sleep is during non-REM sleep. Dreams and nightmares are more common in young children, but everyone dreams because we all have both kinds of sleep.



Dr. Denise Weber

Throughout the night, your brain travels through stages of sleep. Almost every 90 minutes, your brain switches between non-REM and REM sleep. With each sleep cycle, the amount of time spent in REM sleep increases. The longest amount of time spent in REM sleep is during the morning hours. You can more easily remember your most vivid dreams from the early morning because of the extended amount of time in REM sleep.

The number one cause of dreams and nightmares is stress. Nightmares are never enjoyable, and you can prevent them. The best way is to establish a healthy sleep routine. Try going to sleep and waking up at the same time every day. Avoid naps throughout the day unless you have not been able to get enough sleep during the night. Try not to exercise or eat food before going to bed. Getting into this routine may prevent those unpleasant dreams.

If you are experiencing frequent nightmares, contact your primary care physician. Your doctor may be able to refer you to a counselor or psychologist who would be able to discuss your dreams. Your doctor may try some tests to determine whether your nightmares are a result of a physical condition, or may prescribe medications that are designed to help you sleep through the night. You may also be referred to a sleep clinic, where brain waves, muscle activity, breathing, and other sleep activities are checked to determine the cause and treatment of your frequent nightmares.

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