

Excessive Daytime Sleepiness

What is excessive daytime sleepiness?

Excessive daytime sleepiness (EDS) is a sleep disorder. You feel very drowsy during the day and have an overwhelming urge to fall asleep, even after getting enough nighttime sleep. You often doze, nap, or fall asleep when you need or want to be awake and alert. This can be dangerous when you are driving a car or operating machinery. This disorder is also called hypersomnia or somnolence.

What is the cause?

The most common cause of excessive daytime sleepiness is a lack of sleep. The lack of sleep may result from poor sleep habits, being in situations where you cannot sleep, or changes in the times when you can sleep.

EDS may be caused by a physical problem, such as:

- A tumor, head injury, virus, or injury to the central nervous system
- A disorder, such as narcolepsy or sleep apnea. Narcolepsy causes sudden, uncontrollable urges to sleep. If you have sleep apnea, there are many times during your sleep when you stop breathing for more than 10 seconds at a time.
- Medicines, such as tranquilizers, antipsychotic medications, antidepressants, and sleeping pills
- A lack of vitamin D in your diet
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Withdrawal from caffeine, alcohol, or stimulants

Medical conditions such as multiple sclerosis, depression, encephalitis, epilepsy, or obesity may contribute to the disorder.

EDS is most common in teenagers and young adults. It may run in families and be inherited. Sometimes there is no known cause.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- Constant sleepiness
- Frequent napping
- Long nighttime sleeping
- Irritability
- Mild depression
- Memory loss
- Lack of concentration

You may feel frustrated and angry because others think you are lazy or uninterested. EDS may cause problems in your workplace and with family and friends.

If you sleep poorly for a month or more, or if you find sleepiness during the day interferes with normal tasks, see your healthcare provider.

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms and medical history and examine you. You may be asked to visit a sleep center so your sleep can be monitored. Tests may include:

- Polysomnogram. This test is not painful. Before you go to sleep, dime-sized sensors are placed on your head and body. The sensors record brain waves, muscle activity and movement, heartbeat, and breathing.
- Multiple sleep latency test (MSLT). This test shows how quickly you fall asleep, which is a good measure of daytime sleepiness. For the MSLT, you will be asked to take several naps during the test period.
- Maintenance of wakefulness test (MWT). The MWT is similar to an MSLT except that you stay awake instead of napping during the test.

How is it treated?

The treatment depends on the cause. If EDS is caused by a medical condition, treating the medical condition may take care of the sleep problem. If your vitamin D level is low, your healthcare provider may suggest taking a vitamin D supplement. If EDS is caused by medicines, your provider may change your medicine or dosage or the time of day when you take your medicine. Your provider may prescribe stimulant medicine to help keep you awake during the day, or medicine to help you sleep better at night. Lifelong treatment may be needed.

How can I take care of myself?

- Follow the full course of treatment your healthcare provider prescribes.
- Take care of your physical health. Try to get at least 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night. Eat a healthy diet. Limit caffeine. If you smoke, quit. Avoid alcohol and drugs. Exercise regularly according to your healthcare provider's instructions.
- Contact your healthcare provider or therapist if you have any questions or your symptoms seem to be getting worse.
- You can get more information from:
 - National Sleep Foundation
202-347-3471
<http://www.sleepfoundation.org>

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